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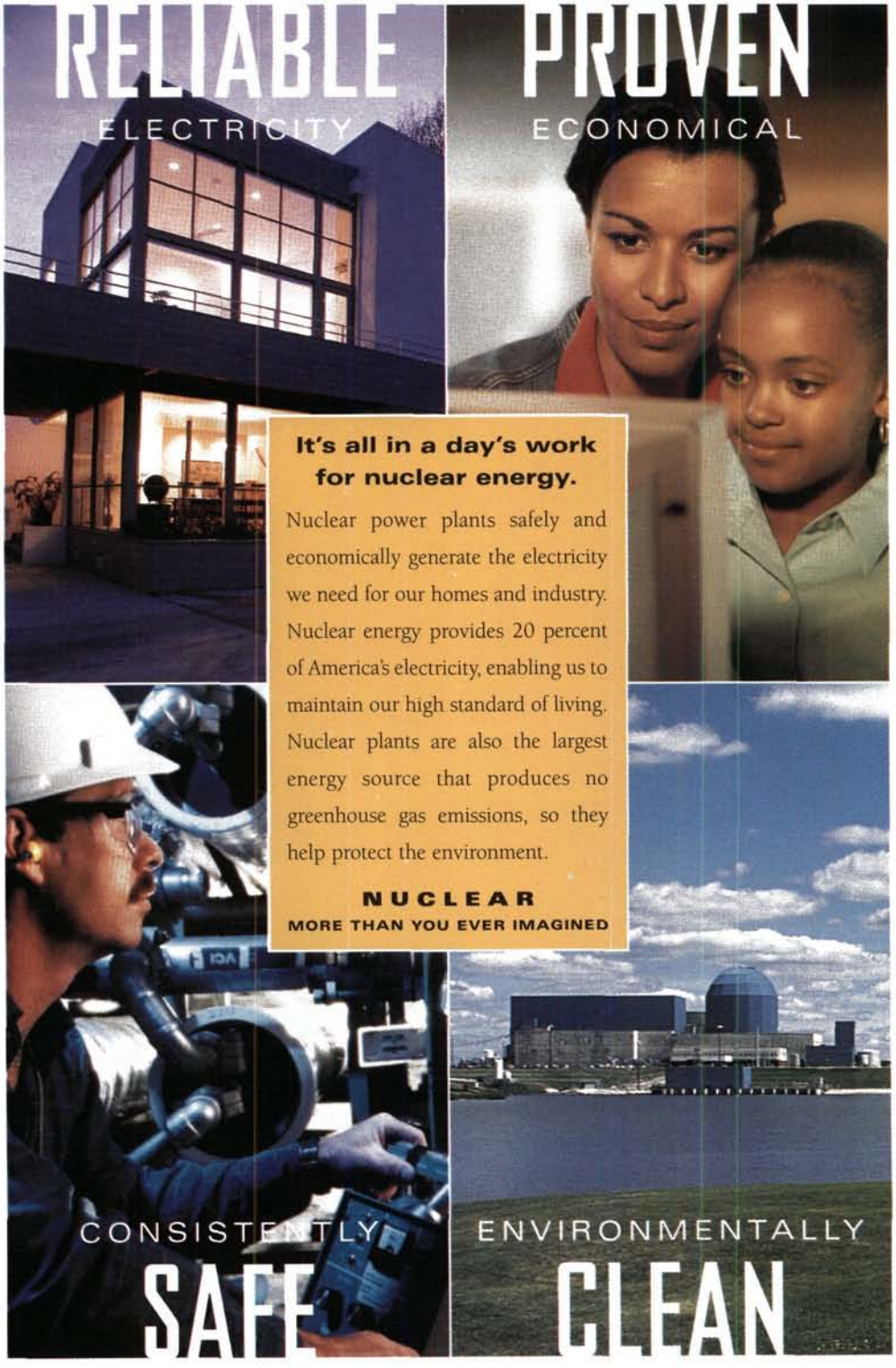

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NOVEMBER 30, 1998

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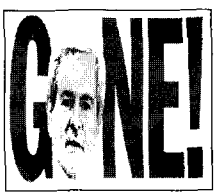

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Articles on pages 8, 12, 20, and 24.

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** Human intelligence, human rights, &c.

6 **GREGG EASTERBROOK** TRB: COSMIC CLUNKER John Glenn's flight was inspirational. NASA's next endeavor isn't.

7 **THE EDITORS** GETTING SERIOUS The United States is threatening Iraq once again. NOTEBOOK A farewell to Pat, &c.

8 **JOHN B. JUDIS** HISTORICAL ERROR Newt Gingrich misread America's political past. Now *he's* history.

12 **GARANCE FRANKE-RUTA** ON THE HILL: MISCONCEPTIONS The latest pro-life crusade is a movement to relabel contraception as a form of abortion.

14 **SEAN WILENTZ** HEMINGS HAWING Conservative pundits harrumph at DNA tests proving Thomas Jefferson and his slave mistress had at least one child.

16 **MARTHA RADDATZ** UNIFORM COMPLAINT The president's lies about adultery might have landed an ordinary military man in the brig. But that's not for soldiers to say.

18 **NURITH C. AIZENMAN** SAN FRANCISCO POSTCARD: SMOKED OUT The feds crack down on California's once-flourishing medical-marijuana clubs.

20 **JEFFREY ROSEN** SHAMELESS Done properly, congressional censure of Bill Clinton could be perfectly constitutional. But would it also be perfectly pointless?

24 **DAVID GRANN** THE PERMANENT INSURRECTION Speaker Livingston, welcome to the ungovernable House of Representatives.

27 **ROBERT A. MANNING** TIME BOMB The Clinton administration has trumpeted its deal to freeze North Korea's nuclear-weapons program as a major foreign policy success. In fact, U.S. policy may have only postponed the danger.

32 **STANLEY KAUFFMANN** ON FILMS: IRISH INTERIORS Meryl Streep goes native, brilliantly, in *Dancing at Lughnasa*.

34 **ROBERT BRUSTEIN** ON THEATER: MCNALLY ON THE CROSS *Corpus Christi* is a self-important take on the greatest story ever told.

36 **MINDY ALOFF** ON DANCE: SWAN DIVE Matthew Bourne's new production is unfair to *Swan Lake*—and to swans.

41 **JED PERL** ON ART: POLLOCK FEVER Fifty years later, what do we see in Jackson Pollock?

44 **YEHUDA AMICHAI** POEM *Now After Many Years*

46 **YEHUDA AMICHAI** POEM *And In Those Days*

48 **JAMES WOOD** THE SEEING I *Blindness* by José Saramago, translated by Giovanni Pontiero

52 **YEHUDA AMICHAI** POEM *Jerusalem Is A Merry-Go-Round*

54 **YEHUDA AMICHAI** POEM *Balaam Balaam*

56 **ADAM KIRSCH** THE VIRTUOSO *Hay* by Paul Muldoon

62 **MARTIN PERETZ** CAMBRIDGE DIARIST: SIEGE MENTALITY

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CORRESPONDENCE

Multiplicity

To the editors:

James Traub, in "Multiple Intelligence Disorder," misses the point of Howard Gardner's work (October 26). Whether there are seven or eight or 100 intelligences is less relevant than Gardner's fundamental point, which is that human potential is more multifaceted than early psychometricians claimed.

JACQUELINE COSSENTINO
Athens, Ohio

To the editors:

The problem with traditional intelligence tests is that they capture only a portion of the skills that enable people to succeed in the adult—real—world. Using M.I. theory enables more students to learn. That is not to say that reading, writing, and computing are not important; they are. But schools should be child-centered, focusing on ways to help all students learn, rather than curriculum-centered, unnecessarily creating a hierarchy of winners and losers.

THOMAS R. HOERR
St. Louis, Missouri

To the editors:

During the 28 years that I taught English in the Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second-largest, I had many students who never mastered the basic concepts of my class but who were clearly gifted in music and art. Using James Traub's criteria, schools would have to write off these students as failures. Yet today, in retirement, I run into many of these same students and find them quite successful and content in the fields of their unique talents. In the final analysis, which is more important: schools that bring out the best students have within, whatever that might be, or schools that insist on conventional curricula?

WALT GARDNER (no relation)
Los Angeles, California

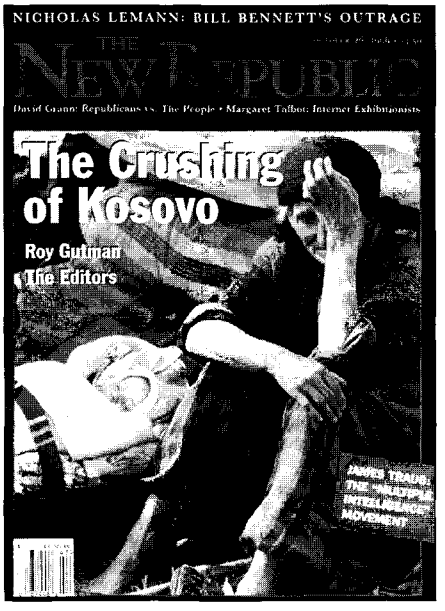
In violation

To the editors:

It is normally a waste of time to respond to ad hominem attacks such as those contained in the October 26 Notebook regarding Amnesty International's campaign against U.S. human rights violations. Words like "preposterous," "agitprop," and "scurrilous" signal a preference for name-calling over serious argument. Were TNR not such a respected journal, I would save my ink.

First, nowhere in our report do we suggest that U.S. human rights violations are a "matter of official and systematic American policy." But that is also true of most of the 150 countries we monitor. It is the rare and isolated government that brazenly adopts an official policy justifying the commission of human rights violations. Does that mean, however, that when we find patterns of police harassment or sexual abuse of women in prison we should ignore them because they violate official policy?

Nowhere in our report do we treat the United States "in the same moral and political categories as, say, Syria or Guatemala." In fact, it is long-established Amnesty practice never to rank or compare countries but rather to describe



each country's human rights situation for itself as accurately as we can.

While it is true that Amnesty opposes the death penalty, TNR misses the point entirely with regard to the racial disparities involved in this issue. The racism evidenced in the application of the death penalty turns on the fact that, though roughly the same number of victims of murder are black as are white, more than 80 percent of those on death row were convicted of killing a white person, and, if you are black and are convicted of killing a white person, the odds of your being sentenced to death are three to four times greater than if your victim was black.

Finally, TNR skewers Amnesty's Secretary General Pierre Sané for suggesting that international human rights standards are "moving really ahead" of the United States. But what other conclusion can we draw when the United States, one of only six countries in the world that continue to execute juvenile offenders, adopts a policy similar to Iran, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen? And what other conclusion is appropriate when the only two countries that have failed to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child are Somalia and the United States?

TNR claims that Sané is a man who "has eyes but does not see." How sad that TNR would have us see the motes in every other country's eyes except our own.

WILLIAM F. SCHULZ
Executive Director
Amnesty International USA
New York, New York

To the editors:

Your Notebook item sets up a false dichotomy to criticize Amnesty International's recent report on the United States. Because it is not "official and systematic" policy for prison guards or police officers in the United States to beat or abuse people, you suggest that America doesn't have a human rights problem. But our government does systematically fail to punish or discipline violent criminal justice officials, as Human Rights Watch has documented in detail in recent reports on police brutality and the sexual abuse of female prisoners. Ignoring excessive official violence is different from ordering it, but it is still a human rights violation.

ALLYSON COLLINS
Human Rights Watch
Washington, D.C.

Military sadness

To the editors:

Charles Lane's lament about our military's increasingly risk-averse posture is sound ("Casualty Attitude," October 26). I offer only a friendly amendment. For the past two decades, the military has sold itself to potential recruits not as a special and patriotic calling but as a job, one that promises training, medical care, early retirement, and secure pensions, which contribute to the timidity Lane observes.

STAN NEUSTADTER
New York, New York

To the editors:

Charles Lane makes many sensible remarks in his article "Casualty Attitude," but he might have exercised a more critical eye upon George Bush's dealings with Saddam Hussein. President Bush dealt well with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, but many questions remain. If Saddam Hussein had been deposed, would his successor(s) have had less ambition for Iraq? Would autocracy then have bent in the direction of democracy? Would other Middle East and Gulf states have approved of pursuing Hussein to the end? If Bush had ordered General Schwarzkopf

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to remove Saddam, might Hussein, in desperation, have resorted to the use of chemical and biological weapons on U.S. troops? What would have been America's response? A limited nuclear missile attack? What of the prospect of nuclear fallout? To be sure, President Bush's understandable aversion to U.S. casualties still does not tell the whole story.

ELLIOTT A. COHEN
New York, New York

Idea of the good

To the editors:

Alan Wolfe's review of my book, *A Dream Deferred*, begins like a bad student essay with a scattershot and uncomprehending recitation of some of the book's points and then slides into a confused defense of his own vague liberalism against an even vaguer conservatism that is nowhere to be found in my actual book ("Beneath the Skin," November 23). After making me the standard-bearer for this amorphous, demon conservatism, he makes the bizarre statement that my "mood is not very attractive" because it is not liberal. And, in a way, he is right. My "conservatism" was born of exasperation at the failure of post-'60s liberalism to develop blacks into an irrefutable equality with whites. In the liberal good mood that he says is "capacious, pluralistic, measured, experimental" (whatever this means), I hear the same worthless white sentimentality and self-flattering euphemisms that ruined my good mood in the first place.

No amount of black failure ruins the liberal good mood, because this liberalism never risks its mood on black achievement, never bets on the people it claims to help, and, worst of all, never asks anything significant of them. Wolfe is worried only about some phantom conservative ideology that he ascribes to me. It never occurs to him to wonder whether my "conservatism" would actually help blacks to become competitive with whites. This, despite the fact that the values and the habits I advocate have made Jews, many Asian American groups, and West Indians (all victims of discrimination and prejudice) more than the equal of whites.

When Wolfe says that one searches through my book "for a positive vision of a good society," it is clear that this is really what he wants—not black competitiveness but some perfected version of the "good society" that might lend an easy high-mindedness to his liberal identity. So I guess he did not read the section beginning on page 80 on how such "ideas of the good" are invariably used to seize undemocratic power: announce that you have a vision of "diversity" and

continued on page 60

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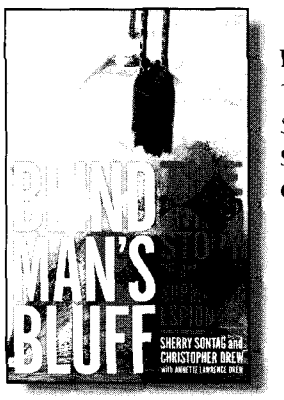

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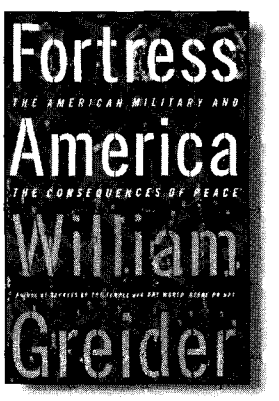

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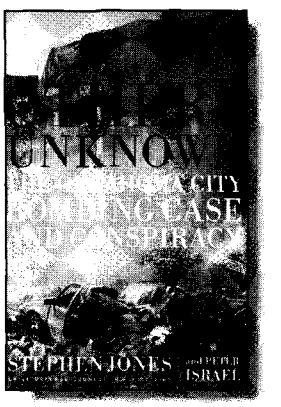

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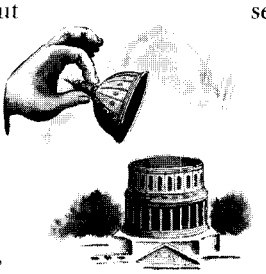
FROM WASHINGTON

Cosmic clunker

It was not only pleasingly nostalgic but genuinely inspirational to behold John Glenn arcing into orbit again last month, reminding us that neither individual courage nor Kennedy-era dreams need ever end. But what comes next for the space program is unlikely to inspire. Due late in November is the first hardware launch for the space station, an expected seven-year construction effort. With flimsy scientific justification and an exorbitant price, the space station is a cosmic clunker.

NASA's space station is a true international effort, as evidenced not only by European and Japanese roles in the project but also by the stunning fact that the facility's first component will be Russian-built and will thunder skyward aboard a Russian rocket. A decade ago, who could have imagined that? But the bulk of the project is NASA's: most management, manufacturers, launches, and crew will be American, along with almost all the funding. A few weeks ago, Bill Clinton approved an emergency subsidy of $660 million for Russia's space agency to keep it from going out of business, while NASA hardware sits in its clean rooms being prepped. This money is strictly a transfer payment from U.S. taxpayers to Russian aerospace contractors. Who could have imagined that, either?

The obvious concern about the station project is its immoderate cost. Administrator Daniel Goldin has done a wondrous job of reviving the space-probe side of NASA (think of that little, lovable Mars lander) but has dead-ended against the "manned" space lobby, which channels huge sums to facilities in favored districts in Alabama, California, Florida, Maryland, Ohio, and Texas. Today the station's sticker price is $21.3 billion, but $40 billion is more realistic when launch costs are taken into account. Then, once the Tang begins to flow and the station becomes operational, there'll be servicing costs. Space-station crew members, for example, will require several gallons per day of fluids for drinking and hygiene. At space shuttle payload prices, four gallons of water cost about $320,000 to place in orbit. (This is a conservative calculation.) So there will be the space-station crew, floating in an orbital hotel, consuming $320,000 worth of bottled water per person each day. Estimated annual bottled water cost for the station: $817 million. Is this a defensible use of public funds?



It might be if the space station served some pressing scientific need, but it doesn't. The U.S. science community is close to unanimous in opposing the space station, which will sponge appropriations away from other, higher priorities. Space research itself is far more cost-effective when done by satellites and probes, several of which can be launched for the price of a single space-station resupply mission. The only research the space station will excel in is long-term observation of the physiological effects of space. That's fine, but is data on this abstract question really worth $40 billion when earthbound requirements for medical research are taken into account?

Collaboration with Russia might justify the project. Visiting mission control in Houston a few years ago, I was amazed to count the number of Russians wandering the halls of what was once a cold war alcazar. Goldin, a former executive of the Strategic Defense Initiative, told me, "During the cold war, I worked on weapons intended to destroy the Soviets; now, it is my moral obligation to show the world that the United States and Russia can cooperate peacefully on projects that benefit everyone." No one could fail to admire that sentiment.

In an unnoticed technical decision, Goldin stipulated that the new station be hung in an orbital "inclination" that is convenient to the Russian cosmodrome but all wrong for Cape Canaveral. The upshot of this decision is that the small number of Russian flights to the space station will cost as little as possible, while the payloads of NASA launches will fall, adding billions to the cost on the U.S. side: a huge, disguised gift to the Russians. Goldin's gesture here is a generous one, but it hinges on

continued on page 61

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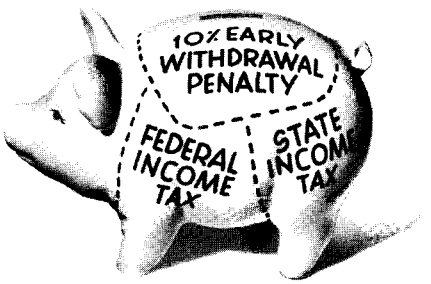

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THE NEW REPUBLIC

NOVEMBER 30, 1998

GETTING SERIOUS

Here is how the United States "responds powerfully" to Saddam Hussein's clear violation of the deal he made with the United Nations last February, in order to avert the last threatened U.S. use of force. On October 31, he announces his decision to halt all cooperation with the U.N. weapons-inspection team, known as UNSCOM. (This follows a similarly defiant announcement on August 5.) The next day, "a senior administration official" tells *The New York Times*: "If Saddam means what he says this time, a military strike would be prominent among our list of options." Then the secretary of defense, William Cohen, announces publicly that "everybody is getting weary of dealing with Saddam Hussein."

Actually, what everybody is getting weary of is listening to the Clinton administration fret about dealing with Saddam Hussein. Of course Saddam means what he says. The real question is whether the administration means what it says—or, rather, if it even means to say anything. That phrase—"respond powerfully"—comes from an op-ed national security adviser Sandy Berger published way back on March 1, explaining how the February deal would set the stage for tough action in the event that Saddam should violate it.

To be sure, this time there's a new tone to the bluster. "Time is running out" for Iraq, Cohen said on November 10. This phrase appeared in a *Washington Post* story headlined "CARRIER, MARINES RUSHED TO GULF." By November 23, the *USS Enterprise* will have arrived off the coast of Iraq. Washington could strike earlier than that, and we hope that the *Enterprise*'s journey will not be used as an excuse by the Clintonites to dither about whether or not to pull the trigger. As of this writing, there have been three high-level meetings at the White House in the past week. According to an official quoted by the *Post*, however, the decision-makers were still "'walk[ing] their way through' basic questions of whether to change U.S. objectives 'from containment to outwardly supporting an overthrow' of Saddam." For his part, the president asked about the potential for civilian casualties in any military strike, according to the *Times*. No word as to whether he also asked about the potential for civilian casualties if Saddam acquires, and uses, a nuclear or biological bomb.

We are solemnly told that American credibility is on the line. And so it is—even the hesitation to use force that has been exhibited so far in response to Saddam's latest provocations has made a mockery of U.S. leadership. Maybe this time the Clintonites really will follow through on their threats; it's hard to imagine how they could avoid doing so. Still, recent history gives us the right to infer that the earnest conversations among the president and his advisers may yet be the prelude to another elaborately rationalized climb-down. We've seen it so many times before: The U.S. warplanes gather. Saddam hesitates for dramatic effect. Then he lets UNSCOM back in. The White House exhales. UNSCOM, badgered and obstructed by Saddam's minions, accomplishes nothing. This is known as "diplomacy backed by force."

It would be comic if only the stakes were not so high. The past year's worth of carefully planned and executed Iraqi belligerence and stalling has already substantially eroded UNSCOM's ability to monitor Baghdad's weapons-of-mass-destruction program. Even if the Iraqis reverse field—as a result of U.S. military strikes or otherwise—and promise full cooperation tomorrow, and, even if they really do cooperate, it would take months for inspectors just to figure out what awful manufacturing had gone on in Iraq's secret labs since the on-again-off-again war between UNSCOM and Iraq started back in October 1997. In other words, no matter what happens now, the consequences of Iraq's having broken its solemn commitment not to develop nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons are already irreversible. We've said it before, but it bears repeating: Iraq has already defeated the U.S.-led international effort to enforce those pledges.

As a result, the menace of Iraqi aggression will overshadow and destabilize the Middle East right through the turn of the century. Unless, of course, Iraq turns its arsenal on one of its neighbors sooner than that. Or unless the United States finally performs in a manner commensurate with its international responsibilities and finds a way to remove Saddam from power. How extraordinary that this dangerous farce has gone on this long. How extraordinary that it has unfolded during the second term of a president who tells us that what matters most to him is his place in history. •

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NOTEBOOK

DEFINING POLITICS UP: Last week brought a dark day for the life of the mind in American government. We are not referring to the downfall of Newt Gingrich, though the Speaker, puffed up even in defeat, volunteered that "I had set out to do a very unusual job, which was part revolutionary, part national political figure, part Speaker, part intellectual." No, the mental impoverishment that the Congress is about to suffer is the retirement of Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who announced that he will not seek a fifth term in the Senate two years hence. Moynihan is not partly an intellectual; he is wholly an intellectual. He is the man who mastered the most momentous development in the intellectual history of modern America—the social sciences, which exploded with a burst of conceptual and empirical sophistication after World War II—and carried it directly to the responsibilities of power. He insisted upon ideas and he insisted upon numbers; and he did not mistake the one for the other. Moynihan has been one of the pioneers of a new instrument of serious, enlightened governance: the policy imagination. In his books and in his service, he has demonstrated that the policy imagination is not a paradoxical thing, that it is possible to think at once fantastically and concretely, at once ethically and practically, at once about the future and the past. Who, in his time, has believed more ardently in the moral and philosophical agency of government? But he located that agency in the agencies. He made the details glamorous. For the entirety of his extraordinary career, to be sure, Moynihan has been a figure of controversy. But the man is a demon of opposition. He has reminded liberals of the truth in conservatism and he has reminded conservatives of the truth in liberalism. In the 1960s, he predicted the fracture of the African American family and was rewarded by right- (or left-) thinking people with an opprobrium that was almost unprecedented in American politics. In the 1970s, he restored the honor of American foreign policy when he demanded, against the strategic callowness of the Carter administration, that the United States hold fast to its proper but unpopular refusal to compromise with communism, Third Worldism, and anti-Zionism. (The photograph of Moynihan raising his lonely hand against the Zionism-is-racism resolution in the United Nations is an image of Dürer-like determination.) He championed ethnicity, not least against the banalities of multiculturalism. He never averted his gaze from the poor, who have been erased from American politics for almost two decades. He restored Pennsylvania Avenue. He never swooned over Bill Clinton. He has been a learned, volatile, dedicated, inconvenient, and irreversible blessing upon American democracy. In a few years, when he is no longer in the Senate, the capital will be an even stupider place. But not the country. For Pat Moynihan to serve, all he has to do is think.

FIDDLER IN THE BASEMENT: One of our friends on the right has discovered yet another threat to the Republic posed by homosexuals: they speak Yiddish, too! David Klinghoffer, in an unintentionally hilarious piece in *The Wall Street Journal* on November 6, reports on the comeback of Yiddish everywhere from Broadway to academia. But, Klinghoffer observes, "there are reasons not to love Yiddish." It is plain-sounding, for one thing. (Has he ever heard it?) Sephardim feel left out by its prominence. And then there is this little kugel of strange premises and prejudices: "More revealing is the fondness of Yiddish among gays. For many Jews, gay and straight, what attracts in Yiddish is its very deadness, at least compared with 60 years ago. They find it comforting to think of Jewishness and Judaism as an object in a museum of antiquities, surrounded by nostalgia, implying no divine displeasure if we, say, eat non-kosher food, marry gentiles, or do whatever gays do." So homosexuals like Yiddish because it is a secular Jewishness, and a secular Jewishness is a godless Jewishness, and a godless Jewishness relieves gays of God's injunctions against homosexuality. Is Klinghoffer unaware that most Yiddish-speakers today are not godless Jews? Or that there are gay Jews who believe in God? Can he speak or read or write a Yiddish sentence himself? Surely this sort of ugly, ignorant thinking is divinely displeasing, and not a part of whatever Jews do.

HOME NEWS: We're proud to announce that contributing editor Jean Bethke Elshtain has recently published a series of her lectures, *New Wine & Old Bottles: International Politics and Ethical Discourse* (University of Notre Dame Press).

CORRECTION: Last week's issue reported an incorrect print date. The correct date is November 4, 1998. •

Gingrich's fatal misreading of the past.

HISTORICAL ERROR

By John B. Judis

Throughout his career in the House of Representatives, Newt Gingrich reminded Americans that he was aware not only of American history—but of his own place in it. And, although many politicians have claimed the same thing, Gingrich ostensibly knew whereof he spoke: he actually has a Ph.D. in history. Alas, for Gingrich, this credential didn't bring

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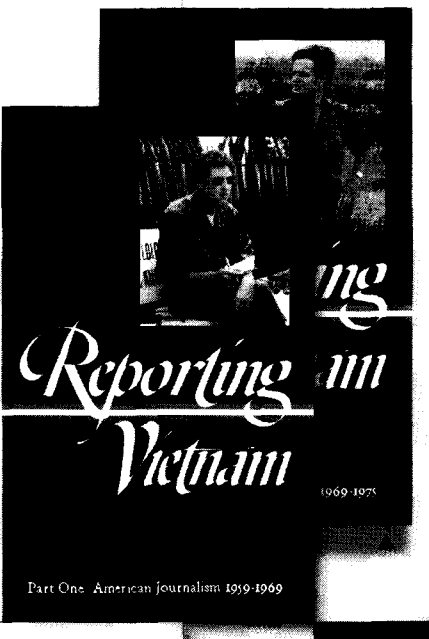

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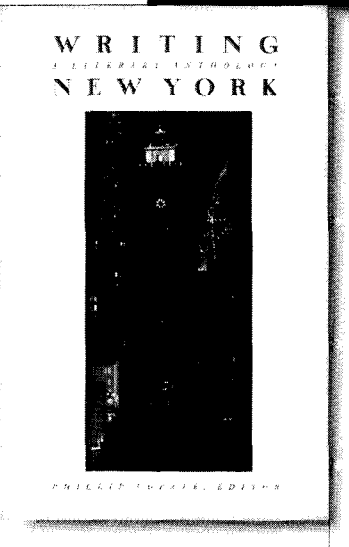

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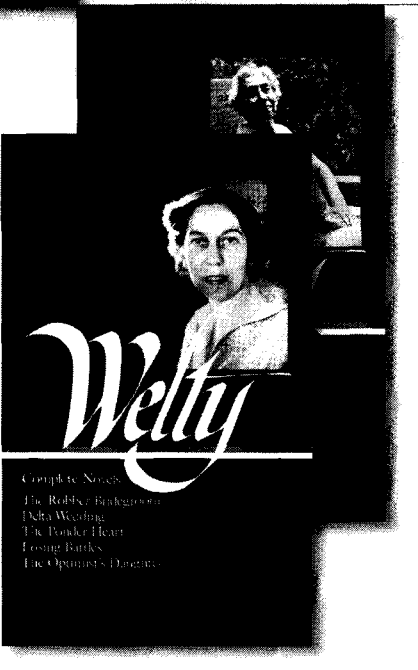

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with it a true understanding of how the past relates to today. Indeed, Gingrich's misreading of U.S. political history contributed to his ultimate downfall.

Gingrich spelled out his theory of history in a series of books (beginning with the most candid, *Window of Opportunity*, published in 1984) and through interviews. One of the clearest summaries is in E.J. Dionne's *They Only Look Dead*, a 1996 book predicting that the Democrats would rise again. Gingrich combined the futurism of Alvin Toffler with the theory of political realignment championed by V.O. Key and Walter Dean Burnham. From Toffler, Gingrich adopted a theory of the stages of history, according to which the United States had passed during the early twentieth century from an agrarian "first wave" to an industrial "second wave" and was now moving toward a post-industrial "third wave," precipitated by an "information revolution." Each wave had its characteristic form of governance. Just as the second was shaped by the welfare and state capitalism of the Progressive and New Deal eras, the third would be shaped by new political ideologies and structures.

From Key and Burnham, Gingrich borrowed the idea that the election of 1896 had been a turning point in American politics—and applied it to the present. In 1896, Republican presidential candidate William McKinley, guided by his campaign manager, Mark Hanna, had represented the "rise of modern America." He defeated Democrat William Jennings Bryan, who represented the agrarian revolt against industrial capitalism, in an election that ushered in the second wave. Gingrich saw himself as Hanna (and later as McKinley); he saw the election of 1994 as a replay of 1896. It would, Gingrich argued, usher in the third wave by banishing the political forces and structures, including the welfare state itself, that were associated with the second. Naturally, Gingrich saw Clinton as Bryan, whom he described to journalist Fred Barnes as a "remarkably shallow but emotionally effective demagogue, maximizing class warfare and a sense of fear in order to avoid modernization."

There was also, however, an unconscious element in Gingrich's theory of history that was a product of his having come of age politically in the late '60s. He envisioned the future apocalyptically—as a choice between heaven and hell. If America failed to adjust to the third wave, he warned Republican candidates in September 1994, "our children will live on a dark and bloody planet." If America adjusted, Gingrich wrote in *To Renew America*, "there is every reason to believe that this new era will see a revolution in goods and services that will empower and enhance most people." He saw the process of change itself as a stark contest between stagnation and revolution. He identified incremental reform with decay. He wanted to "*accelerate* the transition from a second-wave mechanical, bureaucratic society to a third-wave information society" (my italics). He envisioned the election of 1994 not as an ordinary political realignment but as a "revolution."

Alvin Toffler, wiser than his disciple, advised Gingrich after the 1994 election to follow the example of the British conservative Disraeli and co-opt rather than repudiate what was positive in the Democratic opposition. But Gingrich, his mind fixed on an image of revolution and sudden transformation, followed the example of Robespierre and H. Rap Brown. He called for "replacing the welfare state with the opportunity society." He bragged about letting Medicare "wither on the vine." He signed off on legislative proposals intended to cripple the regulatory reforms first adopted under a Republican administration, Richard Nixon's. And, when the administration balked at his plans, he shut down the government itself. By January 1996, Gingrich's program was in ruins. And he was never able to construct a new one in its place, partly because other conservatives wouldn't let him. House Majority Leader Dick Armey and the Young Turks of the Conservative Action Team believed in a similar theory of right-wing revolution and wouldn't abandon it.

There were, of course, elements of truth to Gingrich's worldview. We are indeed in a transition from an industrial to a post-industrial society, but we have been since the 1920s. The new economy—emphasizing consumption over savings, software over hardware, design over mass production, and the global integration of manufacturing—has already forced dramatic changes in the way Americans live, and in our politics. But these changes haven't necessarily followed Gingrich's model or that of other Republican conservatives. The new economy is hostile to religious conservatism; it requires revamping, not eliminating, environmental, consumer, and labor regulation; it puts a premium on public education and vocational training and on new kinds of unemployment insurance to mitigate the insecurity brought about by accelerated change. It's a political economy much more suited to the views of Robert Reich and Bill Clinton than to those of Gingrich or Armey.

And, as the current election demonstrated, it has not yet produced a political realignment like the one that occurred in 1896. American politics today much more closely resembles the 1880s—a time of equilibrium between the parties and programmatic stagnation in Congress—than the economic depression and populist insurgency of the 1890s. During the 1880s, the differences between candidates seemed stark, but the historian, comparing the Arthur, Harrison, and Cleveland administrations, finds far more continuity than change. The current decade is very similar. While it has seen dramatic election battles in 1992 and 1994, and the advancement in 1993 and 1995 of very ambitious, and utterly incompatible, programs by a Democratic president and a Republican Congress, it has also seen remarkable sameness in the actual policies enacted. There is no difference in thrust and intent, for instance, between the Bush administration's 1990 budget deal and the Clinton budget of 1993. There is little difference from 1988 to 1998 in the pattern of public spending or in the kind of domestic policy legislation that Congress adopted.

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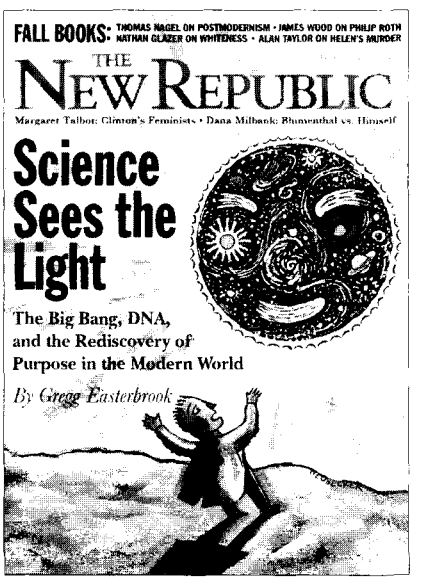
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Clinton, also a child of the '60s and a student of political realignment, believed in November 1992 that he, too, had created a "new era." He didn't compare himself to Hanna and McKinley but to Franklin Roosevelt, whose "hundred days" he promised to emulate. Clinton survived because he accepted the verdict of November 1994 and lowered his sights accordingly. He was able to reconfigure his vision to the more modest political circumstances of the 1990s. Gingrich was forced to resign because—caught between the ardor of his followers and his own grandiose view of history—he was not able to adjust. •

ON THE HILL

MISCONCEPTIONS

By Garance Franke-Ruta

Now that they have been stung at the polls by the Democrats, will congressional Republicans move to the center, or will they try to win back the public with ever-purer doses of conservative ideology? One early indicator could be how the GOP handles the pro-life movement's surprising new crusade: an attempt to relabel most major forms of birth control as abortion-inducing agents, or "abortifacients"—and, eventually, to ban federal funding for them.

An increasing number of pro-life groups are making the case that using certain contraceptives is morally equivalent to murder. "So-called contraceptive technology has advanced greatly in the last ten years to the point where there is now a new battlefront in the abortion realm," notes Laurel MacLeod, legislative and public policy director for Concerned Women of America. There has been, she explains, "a new awakening" to this issue in the past three years.

A group called American Life League is leading the charge. The birth control pill, the IUD, and long-acting hormonal contraceptives Depo-Provera and Norplant are on the group's hit list of abortifacients. So is Preven, the so-called morning-after pill, recently launched by Gynetics Inc. Preven is nothing but four high-dose oral contraceptive pills, repackaged in a convenient kit and accompanied by clear instructions. The Food and Drug Administration insists that Preven does not and cannot induce abortions because the FDA, like many medical organizations, defines the beginning of pregnancy as the implantation of a fertilized egg in the uterus. (Indeed, implantation often fails naturally.) But the American Life League and other major pro-life groups, like the National Right to Life Committee, believe that life begins at fertilization. Thus, in their view, drugs that prevent the implantation of a fertilized ovum are morally indistinguishable from surgical abortion.

To be sure, the American Life League is perceived with some disfavor even within the tight-knit world of conservative family-values organizations: Roman Catholic rather than evangelical Protestant, it is seen as too blunt in its rhetoric and somewhat naïve in its tactics. Nonetheless, its argument on "abortifacient birth control" is gaining prominent adherents on the right, including Gary Bauer's Family Research Council, the Christian Coalition, Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, and Operation Rescue. Several Republicans in the House have taken up the issue, including Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, who helped found the Family Caucus, Chris Smith of New Jersey, who cochairs the Pro-Life Caucus, and Joseph Pitts of Pennsylvania, who chairs the Values Action Team. Several senators are also on board, including Jesse Helms, Majority Whip Don Nickles, and presidential aspirant John Ashcroft of Missouri.

In July, Smith, the House's staunchest foe of abortion, introduced a provision designed to change an amendment drafted by New York Democrat Nita Lowey. Lowey's amendment, attached to an appropriations bill, proposed to mandate that federal employee health insurance plans pay for prescription contraceptives. Smith's amendment would have prohibited "coverage for abortifacients." When Smith was asked by confused representatives to specify what he meant, he cited Preven and the IUD. Coburn, who is a family practitioner by profession (although he is often mistakenly portrayed as an obstetrician by pro-lifers), strongly supported Smith's move.

Smith's amendment failed, but conservative pro-life groups did not give up. Senator Sam Brownback, a Kansas Republican, led a cadre of deeply conservative senators in opposition to the provision. "We are concerned," wrote Brownback, Ashcroft, and six others in a letter to Republican Conference chair Ben Nighthorse Campbell of Colorado, "with what appears to be a loophole in the legislation regarding contraceptives that, upon failing to prevent fertilization, act *de facto* as *abortifacients*." They also discussed "recently FDA-approved abortion-inducing drugs," a clear reference to Preven and other birth control methods.

It worked: While Lowey's amendment passed both the House and Senate, it was dropped by the House-Senate Conference Committee—a highly unusual move. The Lowey amendment became law only after Democrats managed to work it into the omnibus appropriations bill at the last minute. "The Republican leadership seemed to be willing to take their cues from the Coburn faction every step of the way as the [Lowey] bill was wending its way through the House," observed Susan Cohen, legislative director of The Alan Guttmacher Institute, a reproductive-health policy group.

Coburn himself doesn't see it that way. The GOP

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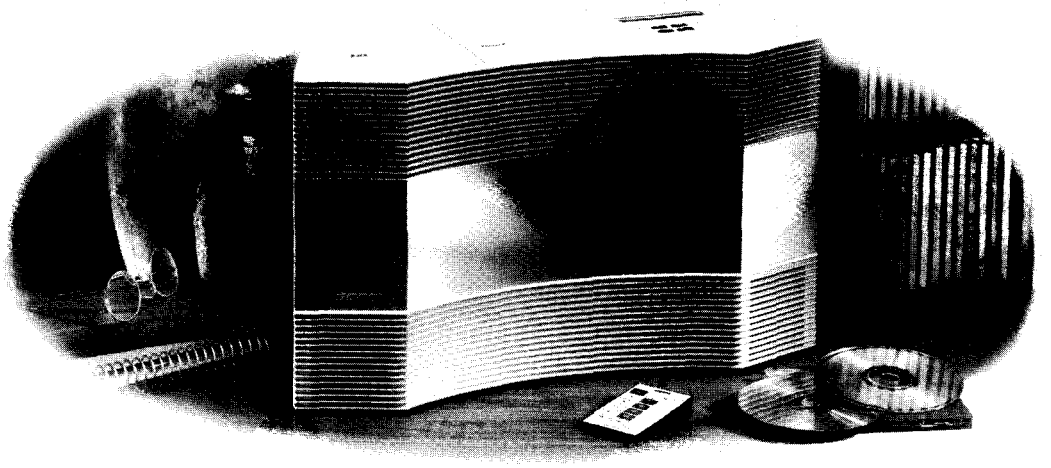

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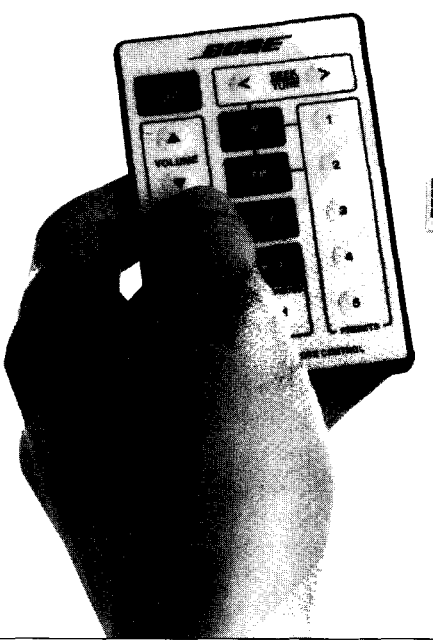

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leadership's last-minute abandonment of the Smith amendment "is one of the things conservatives are upset about House leadership caving on," says Coburn's spokesman, John Hart. Meanwhile, moderate Republicans claim to be baffled by the fuss. "I'm not sure what they're trying to describe," said Don Meyer, Senator Olympia Snowe's press secretary. "It's a hard-core element that went after this legislation and was afraid to debate it in the light of day." The conservatives plan to press their case again next year. Apparently, this is not going to be the issue that finally unifies the party. •

What Tom and Sally teach us.

HEMINGS HAWING

By Sean Wilentz

The DNA test proving that Thomas Jefferson fathered at least one child with his slave Sally Hemings was good news for the Jefferson-Hemings descendants, for a brave and stubborn lawyer-historian, and for the United States. It was bad news for some conservative pundits. And it was gratifying news for me.

More than a year and a half ago, I wrote in these pages that the existing evidence made it "difficult to avoid thinking in terms of the probability, and not merely the possibility, of a Jefferson-Hemings liaison" (see "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Thomas Jefferson," March 10, 1997). This was not, even then, the prevailing view, and I received impassioned complaints from historians. Normally, we history professors cannot count on receiving scientific proof of our interpretations and must content ourselves with what assent we can gain from colleagues. So forgive me if, just this once, I crow a little. The chromosomes are on my side.

Forgive me, too, if I crow even more on behalf of Annette Gordon-Reed. It was Gordon-Reed's book, *Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings: An American Controversy,* that reopened the Hemings-Jefferson matter and offered the most persuasive proof until now that the majority of historians were probably wrong. Her book showed that the tale of Tom and Sally's relationship need not be seen as one of a cruel oppressor and his helpless victim, but as a far more complicated matter, involving two people caught up in an absurd and long-lasting connection. It took courage for Gordon-Reed, a lawyer by training, to buck the professorial wisdom about the holy man of Monticello. It took even greater courage for her to eschew the standard left and liberal melodrama about miscegenation under slavery, and to emphasize the elements of tragedy and honor in her story, as a parable of America's marvelously mulattoized heritage.

And let us not forget to praise the Jefferson-Hemings descendants—John Jefferson and his sister, Julia Jefferson Westerinen, Shay Banks-Young, Lantz Balthazar, and dozens more around the country—suddenly thrust into prominence by their DNA. All along they knew the truth by way of the oral traditions of their family, only to see it denied by those who preferred the Jefferson family myth—chief among them the so-called Monticello Mafia in Virginia, who regarded the story as a foul slander. For more than a century, the Hemingses and their relations have been ridiculed as soft-headed darkies who were trying to filch a piece of greatness and advance themselves in the world. Deep down, the current generation's sense of revenge as well as vindication must be sweet. And yet, remarkably, since the DNA results were announced they have avoided recriminations and told only of the honor they feel.

Faced with a major story about American history and culture, conservative pundits, who are supposed to revere our heritage, reacted in a strangely narrow- and present-minded way. Writing in—where else?—*The Wall Street Journal* op-ed page, Walter Berns of the American Enterprise Institute called the revelations part of an "October surprise" mounted by pro-Clinton historians who wanted to tilt the voting and to head off the president's impeachment. Along with a recent statement by 400 professional historians deploring impeachment (a statement I helped draft and circulate), the Hemings affair was supposed to show that even our greatest Founding Fathers made their sexual mistakes and that Clinton should be exculpated. There was a DNA test. Get it?

The idea that the sublimely named Gene Foster, the scientist who hunted down the Jeffersonian gene (itself an interesting concept), was part of the vast left-wing conspiracy is only slightly less bizarre than the idea that Jefferson and Hemings presciently mated so that, two centuries later, a president named William Jefferson Clinton could get off the hook. But, in the right-wing mind, such improbabilities never get in the way of a good column. Charles Krauthammer has not only endorsed the "October surprise" hypothesis; he has discovered an even deeper plot. For Krauthammer, the chief lesson of the Jefferson-Hemings tale is that it gives "the everybody-does-it line both pedigree and prestige." Surely it was no accident, he claims, that the story broke only two days before the election. And then he clinches his case, revealing that among the signers of the historians' anti-impeachment statement was "the co-author of the article in *Nature* pronouncing the DNA data definitive."

The historian in question is Joseph J. Ellis of Mount Holyoke College, the author of a recent well-received biography of Jefferson. I personally asked him to sign the historians' impeachment statement. At the time, I had no inkling of the forthcoming revelations about Jefferson and Hemings, let alone about his endorsement of the findings. In real life, accidents happen.

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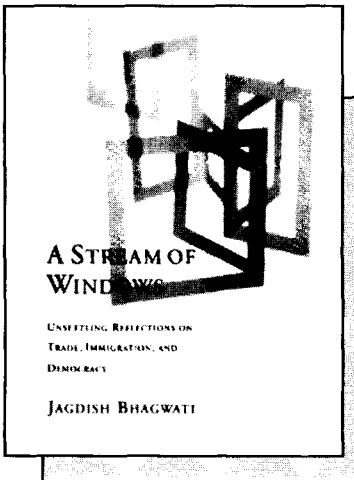
Nor, finally, is there any historical reason to link the Jefferson-Hemings affair with the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, although, to be sure, Ellis (who, until now, had rejected the Hemings story) has tried to do so. "The dominant effect of this news," Ellis has written, "will be to make Clinton's sins less aberrant and more palatable." Krauthammer can almost be excused for his conspiracy theory. When Ellis seeks to squeeze political utility out of Jefferson's bloodlines, he exposes his limited understanding of the Jefferson-Hemings romance.

The story of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky is about lust consensually expressed, and about loneliness and arrogance, and about stupidity and an astounding lack of judgment. The story of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings is about none of these things. It is about a slave-holding widower who, having promised his dying wife that he would never remarry, struck up a covert relationship with his wife's half-sister, of partial African descent, who was also one of his house slaves. It is the stuff of great history and great art.

Unlike the Clinton-Lewinsky saga, we know less about what the Jefferson-Hemings relationship was than what is was not. It was not a sporadic succession of foreplay-trysts. It was a decades-long connection that produced at least one child and probably more. It was not remotely a relationship of equals—a master held much more power over a slave even than a president does over an intern—and yet there is a sense in which the disparity between the appetitive ex-Rhodes Scholar and the fleshy resumé-builder from Beverly Hills was greater. It is said that Hemings spoke French and, it seems, could interest her lover from the neck up, too.

And, though we may never know how much love, if any, Tom and Sally shared, the record shows at least an element of decency that was remarkably lacking in Bill and Monica's fling. Among the handful of his slaves for whom Jefferson provided at his death were Sally's children. According to the Hemings family tradition, the two had agreed that he would free her children, and she had enough influence over him, years later, to hold him to his promise.

So was the greatest egalitarian of eighteenth-century America a hypocrite? In one sense, of course: The love of a master for a slave is by definition a hypocritical love, and the egalitarianism of a slaveholder is a hypocritical egalitarianism. But hypocrisy is not all that can be made of contradictions. It is almost impossible to imagine that the relationship of Tom and Sally was an inhumane one. The conditions were ugly, but the affair was probably not. If there was love, there was not only power. The object of a long emotional and sexual engagement is not only chattel. Indeed, the knowledge that the author of the Declaration of Independence lay gladly and devotedly for decades with a black woman may shed affecting new light on the full resonance of his ardor about equality. The slave may have left the master with more than children. In which case she left the same legacy to America, too. •



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Military grumblers vs. Clinton.

UNIFORM COMPLAINT

By Martha Raddatz

Shane Sellers has been a Marine for 20 years. He worked his way up through the enlisted ranks to the grade of major. And now he's risking this career so he can let the world know what a low opinion he has of his commander-in-chief.

The major's crusade began in October, when he published a column in *Navy Times* titled "Time to Send Clinton to the Showers." In it, Sellers described the president as an "adulterous liar" and "a criminal," then went on to argue that impeachment hearings are "warrant[ed]." The column prompted a Marine Corps investigation to determine whether the officer violated a military law that forbids "contemptuous" public words about the commander-in-chief. But Major Sellers, unintimidated, dug his foxhole deeper. In a November 2 *Navy Times* column, Sellers wrote: "I have strong opinions. So be it."

Shane Sellers is not alone in his disdain for the president. Indeed, at around the same time Sellers's columns appeared, a group of Marines was reportedly circulating an e-mail petition calling for Clinton's resignation. (*The Wall Street Journal* publicized its existence, but the Marine Corps could never confirm it.) Of course, Clinton has always had a hard time pleasing the military—not only because he lacked military service but because some of his first acts in office were to cut the defense budget and attempt to allow gays to serve openly. But, after five years in office, it finally looked as if the military had forgiven all of that: the troops had come to respect Clinton's grasp of national security policy, and they appreciated all of his heartfelt visits. Now, Clinton is back to square one. The military prides itself on "honor, courage, and commitment," and senior officers say it will be difficult for the president to regain the genuine respect of those who now serve. In the words of one officer: "People fight because they believe in what they are doing; they believe in the people who send them into battle. Bill Clinton has broken the faith. We'll still abide by orders, but it breaks the faith."

What really makes some in the military angry is the perception of a double standard. Clinton is not bound by the same rules of conduct that apply in the armed services (although at one point he tried to fend off the Paula Jones suit by arguing that an obscure 1940 statute granting immunity to military officers on active duty applied to him because he was commander-in-chief). And it's lucky for him that he isn't. Violations of military law can ruin careers and even bring jail time for consensual sexual conduct—even conduct that many consider less offensive than Clinton's fling with a 21-year-old intern.

Ask retired Lieutenant Kelly Flinn, the B-52 pilot forced to leave the Air Force in 1997. She was threatened with court-martial over an adulterous affair about which she subsequently lied when ordered to end the relationship. Ask retired Major General John Longhouser. In June 1997, Defense Secretary William Cohen allowed Longhouser, the commander of the Army's Aberdeen Proving Ground, to retire early after he acknowledged that he had had a relationship with a civilian woman five years earlier, while separated from his wife. Or ask the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Joseph Ralston. Ralston was the Pentagon's 1997 choice to become chairman of the Joint Chiefs, until he admitted that he had carried on an affair with a civilian woman 13 years earlier, while separated from his wife. In the aftermath of the Flinn and Longhouser cases, Ralston withdrew from consideration, saying a prolonged fight in the Senate for confirmation would distract from serious national security issues. Clinton and Ralston met to discuss military readiness just weeks after the president's August 17 speech about the Lewinsky affair. It couldn't have been a comfortable encounter for either man.

Now, having endured years of such embarrassments in the name of "good order and discipline," military personnel are being asked to accept what they perceive as presidential indiscipline. Says Charles Gittens, the attorney who represented former Sergeant Major of the Army Gene McKinney against sexual misconduct charges: "People in uniform rightly question, 'How can you hold a young enlisted man to a higher standard than the president of the United States?' " Adding to the indignation is the timing of the president's dalliances: during the week in 1997 when Clinton called Kelly Flinn's punishment "appropriate," he was still meeting secretly with Monica Lewinsky. And, as retired Army Colonel James McDonough noted in a recent hard-hitting *Wall Street Journal* column, the president in November 1995 was talking on the telephone to a congressman about deploying troops to Bosnia—while "simultaneously receiving sexual favors from Monica Lewinsky."

But, while Major Sellers may speak for many in the Armed Forces, few will join his crusade openly—and that's undoubtedly for the best. No matter what the troops think of the president's behavior, it's not their place to criticize him for it publicly. So says Article 88 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, the same code that bans adultery for servicemembers: "Any commissioned officer who uses contemptuous words against the President, the Vice President, Congress, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of a military department, the Secretary of Transportation, or the Governor or legislature of any State, Territory, Commonwealth, or possession in which he is on duty or present shall be punished as a court-martial may direct."

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Is the Constitution a *Victim* of the Drug War?

TRADITIONAL RIGHTS	RIGHTS LOST
To search your home, police need a warrant based on reliable information of criminal activity from someone whose information the police can verify. *U.S. Constitution Fourth Amendment; Aguilar v. Texas, 378 US 108 (1964); Spinelli v. US, 393 US 108 (1964)*	**Police can search your home based on an anonymous tip.** *Illinois v. Gates, 462 US 213 (1983)*
The right to be left alone — the most comprehensive of rights, and the right most valued by civilized men. *Justice Louis Brandels, Olmstead v. US, 277 US 438 (1928)*	**Police can ignore fences and "no trespassing signs" and search private property without a warrant.** *Oliver v. US, 466 US 170 (1984)*
The government cannot deprive a person of property without due process of law. *US Constitution, Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments*	**Property may be taken from an owner who had no knowledge of its illegal use.** *Bennis v. Michigan, US 116 S. Ct. 994, 134 L.Ed.2d 68, 74-79 (1996)*
"Property is more than the mere thing which a person owns. It is elementary that it includes the right to acquire, use, and dispose of it. The Constitution protects these essential attributes of property . . . " *Buchanan v. Warley, 245 US 60, 74 (1917)*	**Property can be seized even if the owner is not prosecuted or even acquitted.** *US v. One Assortment of 89 Firearms, 465 U.S. 354, 361 (1984. US v. Real Property Located at 6625 Zumirez Drive, 845 F. Supp. 725, 733 (1994)*
"The right of the people to be secure in their persons . . . shall not be violated." *US Constitution, Fourth Amendment*	**Testing bodily fluids for evidence of past drug use is permitted for many government employees, even when there is no suspicion that the employee used drugs or even without suspicion of widespread drug use among employees.** *NTEU v. Von Raab, 489 US 656 (1989) Skinner v. RLEA, 489 US 602 (1989)*
[There is] a tradition and strong resistance of Americans to any military intrusion in civilian affairs. This tradition has deep roots in our history. *Chief Justice Burger, Laird v. Tatum, 708 US 1, 15-16 (1972)*	**Amendments to the Posse Comitatus Act allow the military to serve as police within the United States, giving them the authority to enforce drug laws, operate equipment, conduct joint operations with police, and conduct training exercises. The military was designated by law to be the "lead agency" for interdiction efforts.** *National Defense Authorization Act of 1982, sec. 905; 1989, sec. 1104; 1990 and 1991, sec. 1201; 1991 sec. 1004*
The use of the military in domestic law enforcement was traditionally a criminal offense. *The Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, 18 USC 1885*	

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Fortunately for Clinton, it doesn't matter if the "contemptuous" words are accurate. "The truth or falsity of the statements is immaterial," the regulation states.

Military order and discipline depend on showing respect for one's superiors, and, in a democracy, it is particularly important that military officers obey their civilian commanders—except, of course, when the orders themselves are illegal. As Marine Corps Judge Advocate Major Brett D. Barkey explained in a letter to *Navy Times*, officers need not "like our civilian leaders, approve of their conduct, or accept their example as the standard of behavior permissible in our Marine Corps or our families, but we must obey them. And for the good of our 200-plus-year-old experiment in democracy, we must suppress the urge to broadcast any disgust we may have with them."

In 1993, Air Force Major General Harold Campbell ignored that dictate—and paid a price. Campbell was apparently looking for laughs at a military awards ceremony when he took aim at newly elected President Clinton. Speaking before an all-military audience, the former fighter pilot called his commander-in-chief a "pot-smoking, skirt-chasing, gay-loving draft-dodger." Campbell's attempt at humor fell flat. So did his career. The two-star general was fined, reprimanded, and forced to retire early for his "contemptuous" public comments.

His dislike of the president was undoubtedly shared by others in the room in that first year of Clinton's term, but, in the military, private sniping is one thing—and public comments quite another. Campbell's words were met with scattered boos and hisses. Merrill McPeak, then the Air Force chief of staff, was so appalled by the incident that he issued a personal apology to the American people on behalf of the Air Force, saying Campbell's behavior was "wrong" and could not be tolerated. The military, McPeak said, must understand the need for "absolute respect up and down the chain of command."

The brass has adopted a similar posture in reaction to Major Sellers's letter and other signs of disgruntlement over the Monica Lewinsky scandal. In an October letter to all Marine Corps general officers, prompted by the e-mail petition, Assistant Marine Corps Commandant Terrence Dake wrote, "You must emphatically discourage any such action. It is unethical for individuals who wear the uniform of a Marine to engage in public dialogue on political and legal matters such as impeachment." Sellers says, "I am stuck in a whirlwind that would force me to choose between speaking my conscience as a responsible American and keeping quiet like an idiot." That would be his right as a civilian, of course, but it's one of the rights he forfeited when he put on the uniform. Sellers may or may not be correct that the president's behavior is so bad that it warrants removal from office. But, even if it is, it is an occasion for democratic, civilian repudiation—not a military rebellion.

MARTHA RADDATZ is Pentagon correspondent for National Public Radio.

SAN FRANCISCO POSTCARD

SMOKED OUT

By Nurith C. Aizenman

Jeff Jones, tall, thin, and 24 years old, stares defiantly into the middle distance. He's standing on Broadway, a slightly run-down avenue in downtown Oakland, California. Behind him is a tall office building, home to the Oakland Cannabis Buyers' Cooperative, of which Jones is the director. It is one of more than two dozen cannabis clubs that sprang up in the two years after California voters passed Proposition 215—a measure that made it legal for people whose doctors have "recommended" marijuana as a medical treatment to obtain and use it, if necessary, with the help of a caregiver.

A disheveled man in a wheelchair rolls up to Jones, breaking Jones's reverie and causing him to laugh in surprise. The man is the third member of the Oakland club to happen by during our interview. "You lookin' for cannabis today?" Jones asks the man. "Yeah," he answers in a gruff voice, then points in mock disgust at a paper cup Jones is holding. "What's this? Just coffee now!?" he cries. Jones smiles wryly and nods. Several days ago a federal judge ordered him to hand the club's keys over to federal marshals, making it the fourth of six cannabis clubs targeted in a lawsuit by the U.S. Justice Department to shut down.

Although voters in five other states—Alaska, Arizona, Washington, Oregon, and Nevada—just passed initiatives similar to Proposition 215, California's once-flourishing cannabis clubs are fast becoming an endangered species. Many have been put out of business by local district attorneys and judges who reject the idea that Proposition 215 legalizes large-scale buying or growing cooperatives like the Oakland club. And, in many of those communities where local authorities support the clubs, the Justice Department has intervened with a lawsuit to close them down. This has prompted a major clash between local government and Washington—and Uncle Sam is winning.

Concerned that Proposition 215 was just a step down the slippery slope toward legalization of marijuana in general, the Clinton administration felt it needed to take a tough stance against medical-marijuana use early on. While there does seem to be evidence that marijuana can help treat the symptoms of such diseases as AIDS, glau-

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coma, and epilepsy, as well as ease the nausea of cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, government officials argued that the proper way to determine the safety and efficacy of any potential medicine is through the FDA's scientific review process—not through a public vote. Furthermore, an FDA-approved pill form of one of marijuana's active ingredients, THC, already exists (though many patients claim it's not as effective as smoking and complain that the government has not supported enough research into the matter). Finally, there seemed no limit to the kinds of ailments for which some of the cannabis clubs were distributing their product. Perhaps no operation was more notorious than the San Francisco Cannabis Cultivators Club—serving 12,000 members and led by a convicted marijuana dealer named Dennis Peron, who encouraged patients to smoke their pot on the premises in a party-style atmosphere and touted it as a cure for "stress" (see "The Return of Pot," by Hanna Rosin, TNR, February 17, 1997).

But the Clinton administration's battle against Proposition 215 got off to a shaky start. In December 1996, the administration announced that it planned to repeal the federal prescription license of any doctor who recommended marijuana to a patient. That move inflamed public opinion and was later barred by a preliminary court injunction on the grounds that it infringed upon doctors' First Amendment rights. This setback convinced the administration to adopt a low-key approach. Under the new plan, the Justice Department would focus its efforts on those communities, generally concentrated in the San Francisco area, where local officials were actually *encouraging* cannabis clubs to set up shop. And, rather than cart club directors and members off to jail on criminal charges, the Justice Department would simply pursue a civil injunction ordering the clubs to close, which would also have the benefit of avoiding more public relations nightmares.

In theory, the Justice Department had an open-and-shut case. Federal law holds that marijuana-smoking has no recognized medicinal use and that the production, distribution, and consumption of the plant is illegal under any circumstances. And federal law is supposed to trump any marijuana law passed by California. In almost any jurisdiction, that argument would have easily carried the day. But, of course, this was not just any jurisdiction. It was San Francisco.

"This is me at a press conference representing Patty Hearst," says Terence Hallinan. San Francisco's district attorney is giving a tour of the photographs hanging in his office. There's Hallinan and his wife protesting the Gulf war. There's a framed 1963 permit from the city of Greenville, Mississippi, granting Hallinan permission to lead a civil rights march. There's Hallinan's father, Vincent, who ran for president on the leftist Independent Progressive Party ticket in 1952. I remark that he has assembled a veritable wall of American history. "A wall of *radical* American history," he cracks.

A onetime boxing champ and admitted former marijuana smoker who used to hang out with the hippies on Haight-Ashbury, Hallinan would have a hard time get-

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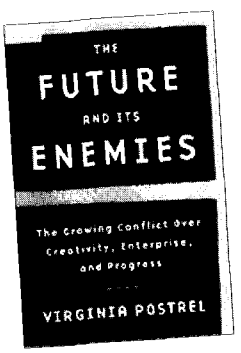

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ting elected district attorney in just about any other county. Not surprisingly, he's sympathetic to the medical-marijuana movement—he even filmed a TV ad urging Nevada voters to pass their own version of Proposition 215. As for the Justice Department's suit, he says, "This is a local issue, a health issue, and the federal government is making a mistake trying to extend their jurisdiction."

Hallinan's attitude is typical of official sentiment here. Soon after Attorney General Janet Reno filed the suit, the mayors of Santa Cruz and San Francisco sent President Clinton letters urging him to call it off. "The harmful impact the closure of these patient clubs would have on patient health and public safety cannot be overestimated," wrote San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown. Oakland officials went even further: This summer, the city council deputized Jeff Jones and the other employees of his club as officers of the city. "It was our understanding that, under the Federal Controlled Substances Act, agents of the city could distribute marijuana or other illegal substances for public-safety reasons," explains council member Nate Miley. "Normally, that is interpreted to deal with undercover enforcement officers going about their duties. We were trying to stretch the meaning of the law."

Charles Breyer, the federal judge in charge of the case, ultimately knocked down that idea. But he has hardly proved an ally to the Justice Department. Indeed, Breyer (who, coincidentally, is the brother of Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer) allowed the case to drag on for months, as he carefully considered each of the clubs' arguments—a move Hallinan says should not have been surprising: "Breyer's between a rock and a hard place. He's a San Francisco judge.... In San Francisco, absolutely everybody knows somebody who uses marijuana for medical purposes." (Charles Breyer declined to comment for this story since the case is still pending.)

In May, Breyer finally issued an injunction ordering the clubs to stop distributing marijuana, although, by this point, three of the clubs had already closed anyway for unrelated reasons. Dennis Peron's club, for instance, had been separately targeted by then-State Attorney General Dan Lungren. Still, the other three clubs named in the federal suit—the Oakland Club, a club in Marin county, and one in the town of Ukiah—refused to close.

Justice Department lawyers went back to Breyer and requested that he take action, because the clubs were violating his order. Breyer's answer was, in effect: "Prove it." In the case of the Oakland club, this was easy. Though the club made a point of restricting access to valid members only, Jeff Jones had dispensed marijuana to selected patients as part of a press conference he held announcing his intention to defy Breyer's injunction. The Drug Enforcement Administration had sent an undercover agent to witness the event. Thus, there was irrefutable evidence that Jones had violated Breyer's order. This October, Breyer finally agreed—and sent in the marshals.

Now the government must specifically prove that the Marin and Ukiah clubs are also distributing marijuana. Not surprisingly, Lynnette Shaw, the Marin club's director, is wary of letting me inside. But the club's exterior reveals plenty. It's located in a nicely landscaped shopping plaza, nestled against the verdant hills of a quaint town called Fairfax. This was once a hippie village, and it still has New Age overtones—a banner advertising an upcoming "PSYCHIC FAIRE AND HEALING FESTIVAL" hangs over the main road in. But the tidy boutiques lining Fairfax's streets make it clear that the town's residents were yuppified a long time ago. And, though the Marin club was largely founded as an offshoot of Dennis Peron's club, it represents something very different.

Standing proudly in the midst of several attorneys' offices, a dance studio, and a hot-tub store, the club is the very picture of bourgeois respectability. It typifies the promise—or the menace, depending on your point of view—that Proposition 215 once seemed to hold: the possibility of a new world, where driving over to the local cannabis club for some pot would be no different from heading to your local health-food store for some St. John's wort to cure your depression.

For one fleeting year, that vision became a reality in California. But now it's dead. To be sure, it's unlikely that the multitudes of individuals who use marijuana to ease their symptoms on their own could ever be prosecuted. And the federal government's battle is far from over—several large clubs still remain open, and new ones keep cropping up. But the Justice Department has won the crucial argument over the clubs' legal right to exist. Now all that remains is to prove that they are operating—something the feds have ample means (whether through depositions, search warrants, or undercover agents) to do. And, even though more states have passed medical-marijuana initiatives, the federal crackdown on large-scale clubs means that, for the foreseeable future, marijuana's entry into the mainstream will be blocked. •

Why censure is constitutional.

SHAMELESS

By Jeffrey Rosen

"It is either impeachment or nothing," Gary McDowell, the conservative legal scholar, told the House Judiciary Committee on November 9. "Thus, the current suggestion that Congress might censure the president is to assume a power not given by our Constitution." Many of the scholars who testified during the opening hearing of the House impeachment inquiry agreed with McDowell, but they were overstating the case against censure. Now that the election returns seem to have short-circuited the

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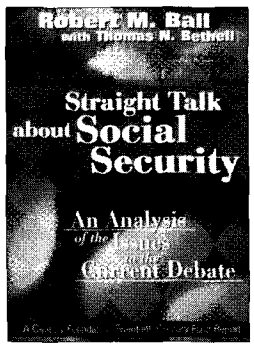

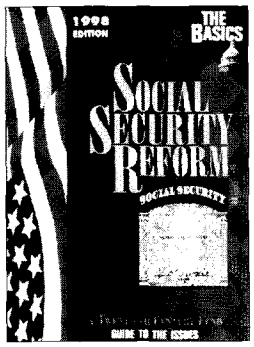

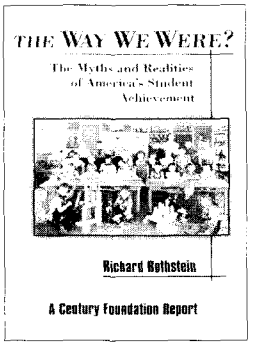
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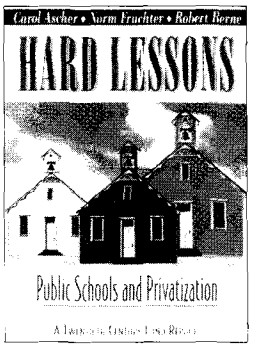

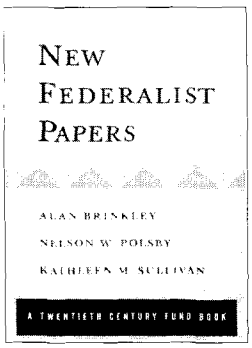

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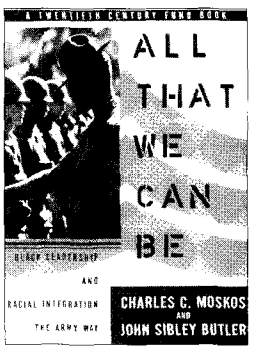

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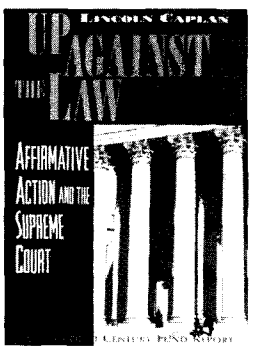

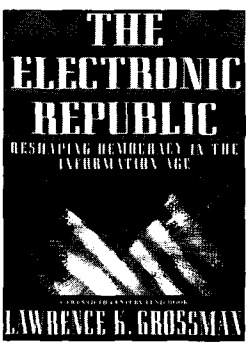

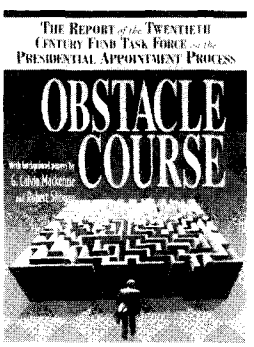

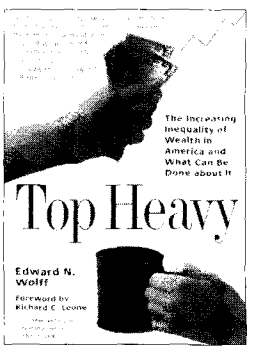
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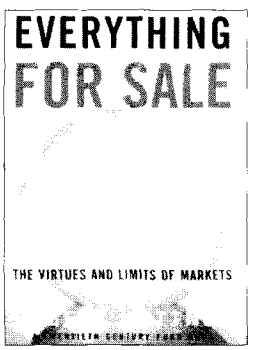

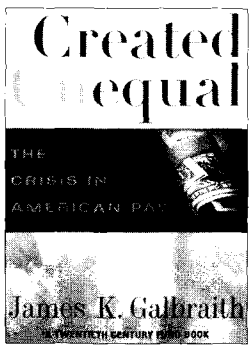

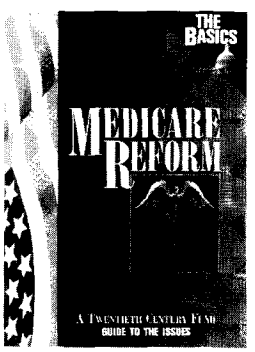

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impeachment effort, there are, in fact, several ways that Congress could censure the president without violating the Constitution.

The constitutional case against censure is rooted in Article I, Section 9, which prohibits Congress from passing bills of attainder. The Supreme Court has defined bills of attainder as laws that single out an individual or group for punishment without a judicial trial. In his classic book, *Three Human Rights in the Constitution of 1787*, Zechariah Chafee describes what was, for the American Founders, a paradigmatic case of an unconstitutional attainder: the English Parliament's crusade against the Earl of Strafford in 1641. Initially, Strafford was impeached for treason and tried in the House of Lords. But, because the real reason Commons impeached him was his excessive loyalty to King Charles I, the attempt to convict him of treason narrowly failed. The House of Commons then decided to pass a bill attainting Strafford of treason, which carried the same penalty as an impeachment but took the form of a legislative rather than a judicial punishment, and thus gave Strafford no chance to defend himself at trial. After the king agreed to sign the bill to fend off an impeachment crusade against his wife ("Put not your trust in Princes," Strafford wryly observed), the earl was beheaded before 200,000 spectators on Tower Hill.

The Strafford case suggests that the House and Senate can't constitutionally punish Clinton by passing a censure bill and enacting it into law over his veto, whether or not it contains some additional penalty, like a fine. That would be a textbook case of a bill of attainder. But, of course, there's little possibility, after November 3, that the House and Senate could muster the two-thirds majority necessary to pass a censure bill over Clinton's veto. Does the constitutional picture change if Clinton voluntarily agrees to sign a censure bill because he fears the political consequences of a veto? The answer depends on how the bill is framed.

If Clinton signs the censure bill under duress, without receiving any explicit benefit from Congress in return, then the purpose of the bill would still be punitive, and bill of attainder problems would remain. As Laurence Tribe of Harvard Law School points out, the right to be free from punishment by a legislature can't evaporate simply because a president, when threatened with impeachment, says, "Please censure me instead." (The masochist says, "Hit me," Tribe notes, and the sadist says, "No.") Because it's hard to distinguish between censure to which the president has reluctantly acceded in order to avoid harsher treatment and censure that the president has enthusiastically requested for the same purpose, Tribe argues, both are legislative punishments and are constitutionally unacceptable.

But, as Vikram Amar of the University of California at Davis argues, there is a subtle, but meaningful, distinction between censure accepted as a lesser punishment and censure granted as a conditional amnesty. Congress can almost certainly draft a bill that tells Clinton, "If you do X, Y, and Z (apologize to us, and, perhaps, pay a fine), then you won't be impeached." Such a bill looks less like a bill of attainder than a plea bargain. Think of the House's role in impeachment cases as analogous to that of a grand jury in ordinary criminal cases. The House has the power to indict the president and, therefore, also has the power not to indict. (In this sense, Gary McDowell and Henry Hyde are wrong to suggest that the House has no prosecutorial discretion to endorse a solution short of impeachment.) And the Senate's power to convict must include the power to grant clemency.

There would be just one problem with a censure bill that took the form of a conditional amnesty. The only representatives and senators who could vote for the bill in good faith would be those who believe that Clinton has, in fact, committed impeachable offenses. But many—if not most—Democrats have already endorsed the proposition that Clinton's behavior doesn't rise to the level of an impeachable offense. No one who takes that position could conscientiously vote for censure as an alternative to impeachment. One way of solving this problem would be for Congress to offer Clinton some other benefit in exchange for his signature—immunity from future prosecution, for example, or a guarantee that decisions about whether to indict him after he leaves office will be made by the Gore or Bush Justice Department rather than the seething special prosecutor. But a deal like this, although clearly constitutional, might be too soft on Clinton even for congressional Democrats.

The House and Senate could, of course, avoid the constitutional difficulties of a formal censure bill by passing concurrent resolutions of censure denouncing Clinton. Because these resolutions wouldn't be presented to Clinton for his signature, they wouldn't be formal bills at all; and, therefore, most scholars, including Tribe, agree that they couldn't be attacked as bills of attainder. When the Whig Senate passed a resolution censuring Andrew Jackson for abusing his office in 1834, Jackson responded by filing a "protest" challenging the constitutional authority of a single branch of Congress, "for the purposes of a public censure, and without any view to legislation or impeachment," to "decide upon the official acts of the Executive." But Jackson's objection was based on the claim that the Senate had unfairly accused him of an impeachable offense—vetoing the Bank of the United States. The Constitution, he insisted, required all charges of official misconduct to be aired in a formal impeachment proceeding. By contrast, if the Senate and the House make clear that they don't believe Clinton's private misdeeds rise to the level of impeachable offenses, they could certainly pass concurrent resolutions expressing their disapproval. These resolutions would have no more legal weight than a petition declaring that Clinton was a bad person, which any member of Congress would have the right to sign under the First Amendment.

Last month, former President Ford suggested in *The New York Times* that Clinton should humble himself in the well of the House, ask for forgiveness, and accept

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Congress's condemnation. But, if Clinton has committed no offense against Congress, he owes Congress no apology. Indeed, the vision of the president humbling himself before the House calls to mind a much older legislative shaming ritual—the formal humiliations that colonial legislatures imposed on journalists and other riffraff who dared to criticize them. In prosecutions for seditious libel, the guilty party was summoned before the assembled legislators. He was then forced to apologize on his hands and knees in an elaborate show of abasement, sometimes placing his knuckles under his knees to show special contrition. In addition, he was expected to pay costs. Why Congress would presume to impose a similar shaming ritual on Clinton isn't clear.

The problem with a resolution of censure isn't constitutional but political. Without exception, all of Congress's previous censure cases involved offenses against Congress itself, beginning with Senator Thomas Pickering, who was censured in 1811 for reading secret government documents aloud on the Senate floor. By contrast, even the most serious of Clinton's offenses—his alleged lies before the grand jury—implicate neither the presidency nor its relation to Congress but at worst constitute an arguable breach of public trust. And the American people don't seem to be clamoring for more apologies.

There is also the practical question of what, precisely, a resolution of censure would be designed to accomplish. Ordinary shaming punishments can serve different purposes. By forcing an offender to abase himself, they can prepare the way for his reintegration into the community, or they can brand the person as a pariah, expelling him from the community of moral agents entirely. (In England, the classic shaming punishment for attainder involved ritualistic disembowelment *after* execution.) But Congress has no standing to banish Clinton or to forgive him. That power belongs to the people alone.

In a metaphorical sense, the Starr investigation itself might be seen as a kind of shaming punishment, the modern equivalent of the ordeal that people with questionable reputations were forced to endure in the Middle Ages. To prove the truth of their oaths, the least respected members of the community had to carry a hot iron for several paces. Their hands were then bandaged, and, if blisters appeared, the suspects were deemed to have sworn falsely. The fact that scalded citizens were often given the benefit of the doubt when it came time to examine their blisters suggests that the real purpose of the ordeal was punitive, not investigative. (We're not sure whether or not he swore falsely, the theory seemed to be, *but at least we burned the hell out of his hand.*) When people say that Clinton has already been humiliated enough, they may be responding to the indignity of treating the president of the United States as if he were a medieval chicken thief.

The real reason that it seems odd to impose a shaming punishment on Clinton is the sense that he's beyond shame. "You could name it the Clinton shaming bill, and he'd say, 'Thank you for naming it after me,' " suggests William Miller of the University of Michigan Law School, who has written books on disgust and humiliation. Miller notes that what anthropologists identify as shaming cultures—those that are exquisitely sensitive to questions of honor and deference—tend to be relatively egalitarian communities, like law-school faculties, where wealth and power are fairly equally distributed and tiny gradations of respect are fiercely contested. "He's triumphed in a world of politicians, which is largely shameless, because, as shameless as all these other guys are, they couldn't go as low as he did," Miller suggests. "*You're the man,* they're saying to him. They're kind of in awe." •

Bob Livingston's unruly inheritance.

THE PERMANENT INSURRECTION

By David Grann

Last Friday, after more than a year of plotting in public and in private, hard-line conservatives finally got what they wanted: Speaker Newt Gingrich's head. But, less than a day later, they were on the phones plotting again, this time against his all-but-certain successor, Louisiana Representative Bob Livingston. He had shown "an appalling lack of judgment," David McIntosh, head of the Conservative Action Team, told *The Washington Post,* vowing to vote against him. Another GOP rebel told me Livingston is not "one of us" and warned: even if he wins, "he can't lead without us."

And so it goes in the Republican House. After Gingrich's resignation last week, most people assumed the ceaseless infighting in the House Republican conference would at last abate. But, in fact, it may only get

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worse. With a mere six-seat majority, any band of dissidents—or "cannibals," as Gingrich called them—can now thwart the legislative process. And, because of little-noticed internal procedural changes in Congress, the modern Speaker, as Gingrich discovered, has become all but powerless against them. "The real problem is not with the leadership," says GOP Representative Mike Parker of Mississippi, who is retiring this year. "The real problem is with the followership."

Indeed, the House of Representatives has increasingly become ungovernable for anyone—not just the much-maligned Gingrich. "It's insane," adds Parker. "I wouldn't want to be in a foxhole with some of these guys." Part of the trouble is the party's familiar ideological division: The House GOP conference is split among Southern evangelicals, Northeastern moderates, and Western libertarians. Gingrich, aware that the Democrats' fragmentation into unmanageable interest groups in the 1980s helped bring about their loss of control over Congress, tried to contain such factions in 1994 by defunding the myriad House caucuses. But dozens of new ones have since emerged, including the Missing and Exploited Children Caucus and the Pro-Family Caucus—all competing to achieve their narrow interests. The Republican conference is also split into two permanent warring camps: the Tuesday Lunch Bunch, a group of moderate Republicans, and McIntosh's Conservative Action Team, a coalition of social conservatives. After four years of fighting, some members barely speak to one another. And, without the Contract with America, there is no overarching concept to bring them together on the House floor—or anywhere else.

DRAWING BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Gingrich's notorious character flaws, of course, exacerbated many of these divisions. His moods often swung as wildly as those of the conference itself. But the deeper explanation for Gingrich's downfall is institutional, not characterological. Several congressional reforms, many of which Gingrich himself championed, along with the distortion of traditional House rules, have made it almost impossible to control the fractious body. (A similar transformation has occurred in the Senate, where the much more personable majority leader, Trent Lott, is also under siege from all sides.)

The most notable of these changes is the most obscure: a new rule limiting committee chairmen to only three terms and the speaker of the House to four. Slipped into a rules package in the first heady hours of the Republican revolution, it was supposed to contain lawmakers' ambitions; instead, it has unleashed them. Livingston began campaigning for the speakership last summer only because his term as chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee was about to lapse. He had nowhere else to go but into retirement (which he also considered). Once he announced his candidacy, young members rushed to support his insurgency while launching their own: under the new system, they could climb the ladder more quickly by joining a coup than by stopping one. "The rule changes have created total chaos," explains GOP Representative Joe Scarborough of Florida. They're "the dumbest thing we've done," adds Resources Committee Chairman Don Young of Alaska.

Even more destabilizing, though, are some members' self-imposed term limits. While Congress never passed term-limit legislation, several crusading lawmakers have voluntarily adopted them. Now they constitute a kind of roving band of mercenaries who wander the House floor, looking for somebody to topple. They have no incentive to work within the system—and no fear of reprisals from the Speaker. "The best thing about it is you get to really piss off some very powerful Republican every six months," Congressman Matt Salmon of Arizona told me earlier this year.

Not coincidentally, the first person to call for Gingrich's ouster was Salmon, who participated in the coup attempt in 1997 and has vowed to serve no more than three terms in Washington. "Members with self-term limits make them even more inclined not to adjust to the system but to make the system adjust to them," explains Barbara Sinclair, a congressional scholar at UCLA. And many rebels no longer settle for adjusting the system—they level it. Under traditional House rules, members are not supposed to use funding for approved federal programs to change public policy. Now they do it as a matter of routine, pollut-

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ing appropriations bills with extraneous amendments that grind the legislative process to a halt. "One member can now almost shut down the government by himself," says a senior GOP aide, "and no one can do anything to stop him."

While shifts within Congress have institutionalized volatility, shifts outside Congress have made it nearly impossible to contain it. In the past, the Speaker could keep upstarts in line by threatening to give them lousy committee assignments, remove their names from major legislation, or even banish them to a basement office. But now a House rebel doesn't land on the Merchant Marine Committee. He lands on "Nightline." And "Meet the Press." And "Hardball." And "Larry King Live." Indeed, today's political dynamic operates in reverse: it punishes loyal team players with anonymity, while rewarding upstarts with celebrity. And it sustains them with the same perks that once only the Speaker could dole out: fame, direct exposure to voters, and access to campaign money.

The failed coup attempt in 1997 did not end the careers of sophomore Republicans like Lindsey Graham and Joe Scarborough; it accelerated them. Despite Gingrich's threats of retribution, they won reelection overwhelmingly and became conservative icons. Another coup plotter, Steve Largent of Oklahoma, is now a serious contender for House majority leader after only two terms in Congress. Not surprisingly, when Matt Salmon concluded he could no longer support Gingrich, he didn't quietly pull the Speaker aside—he sent his message à la Ross Perot on "Larry King Live." Less than 24 hours after Gingrich resigned, Salmon offered a postscript, in the form of an op-ed in *The New York Times*.

Gingrich's one serious effort at exacting discipline actually succeeded only in demonstrating the impotence of the modern Speaker. In 1995, after a group of rebels bucked his order to vote in favor of ending the budget shutdown and reopen the government, Gingrich did what Joe Cannon, Sam Rayburn, or Tip O'Neill would have done in the same situation: he refused to attend their fund-raisers. Only it didn't matter. The money poured in anyway, and the rebels were unrepentant. It only made him more popular, Mark Souder of Indiana told me at the time.

All of these forces have created a permanent culture of insurrection. Gingrich, of course, recognized these historical changes from the outset, and he tried desperately to reinvent the speakership. He read Peter Drucker and Alvin Toffler. He tried to listen and learn. He removed the oak desk in his office and replaced it with couches—a symbolic gesture of his desire to play counselor rather than commander. "He is leading the revolution right out of the pages of my book," business guru Mike Hammer, whose book *Reengineering the Corporation* sold more than two million copies, told me back in 1995. According to Toffler, Newt was a third-wave CEO, "flattening out the hierarchy" and "operating in smaller units and ad hocracies." Party-switching former Democrats like Billy Tauzin of Louisiana and Mike Parker, who had bucked their own party leaders for years, heralded the changes. "He has built a fluid power structure, involving all Republicans, that seems anarchist but really has a strong executive," Tauzin told me at the time. "If the Democrats had adopted such a system [they] might still be in power."

But, by the end of 1996, it was clear that Gingrich was not in control of the minifactions; they were in control of him. At a closed-door meeting just before the 1998 election, a band of conservatives pressured Gingrich to shift tactics and push harder for impeachment. "It reminded me of the government shutdown," recalls GOP Representative Peter King of New York, a leader of the party's Northeastern wing. "They were all screaming and cheering. It was nuts."

Now, into this pandemonium steps two-decade House veteran Bob Livingston, an institutionalist whose ancestors were present at the signing of the Declaration of Independence. A gifted politician, his allies insist he will create order the old-fashioned way: doling out favors, controlling committee assignments, punishing defectors. Even Democrats like David Obey predict that Livingston has the experience to make the House "much less cannibalistic."

But some of the cannibals are already salivating. McIntosh, who tormented Livingston by clogging up the appropriations process with riders and repeatedly threatening to shut down the government, recently labeled the Speaker-in-waiting "an old-style-pork-caucus kind of guy." Other rebels say they will press Livingston just as hard as they hounded Gingrich, and the party's razor-thin majority means they have even more power to do so. "There will only be more bloodshed," says Parker.

Indeed, there is already a precedent. In 1995, when freshman Republican Mark Neumann (who recently gave up his seat to run a losing Senate race in Wisconsin) refused to vote for a critical appropriations bill, Livingston tried to assert his authority—and kicked him off a crucial subcommittee. "At the start of the new Congress ... members pledged to work in support of the panel's business," Livingston said in a press release. "We have tried very hard to address Mr. Neumann's concerns.... We need conferees who can get the committee's work done."

Within minutes, however, Neumann's classmates were rising up. And, by the end of the week, Neumann had not only forced his way back onto the subcommittee but also won a new spot on the Budget Committee—a double assignment virtually unheard of for a lowly freshman. Afterward, Livingston sounded as resigned as Gingrich did last week: "A press release that was sent from my office yesterday ... incorrectly implied that at the start of the one-hundred-and-forth Congress I had exacted the pledge of all members ... to work in support of my agenda. This is a completely false statement." •

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TIME BOMB

By Robert A. Manning

The 14 million inhabitants of Seoul, the gleaming capital of South Korea, live 25 miles from the demilitarized zone (DMZ) separating North and South Korea. Life there is modern, bustling—and eerily precarious. Forty-five years after the Korean War, the thirty-eighth parallel remains the most heavily militarized boundary in the world. On the North side, some 600,000 troops stand within 62 miles of the DMZ, poised to attack on less than a day's notice. These soldiers are backed by some 11,000 artillery pieces, as well as missiles, some of which may be armed with nuclear, chemical, or biological weapons. On the other side wait some 37,000 U.S. troops, along with the South Korean armed forces and millions of Korean civilians. As then-Defense Secretary William Perry observed almost five years ago: "In many ways Korea poses the greatest security threat to the United States and the world today."

And, lately, the Clinton administration's diplomatic effort to stem this threat has begun to unravel. Obscured by U.S. domestic politics, a quiet crisis is slowly building on the Korean peninsula. Menacing North Korean behavior suggests that nightmare scenarios—a suicidal North Korean military attack or nuclear blackmail by Pyongyang against the United States and its Asian allies—might be a step closer to reality than they were five years ago. The administration is scrambling to salvage its Korea policy; there have been no fewer than three Cabinet-level meetings on the subject in recent weeks. Congress, disturbed by the trend, has effectively given the administration six months to either show that its policy of "engaging" the North is working or face a cutoff of funds. Next spring could be tense in Northeast Asia.

This is not, of course, what you have been hearing from the administration, which still touts Korea as a foreign policy success. The basis for this claim is the U.S.-North Korea "Agreed Framework," which ended the 1994 crisis over North Korea's apparently accelerating nuclear weapons program. Neither an agreement nor a treaty, the framework was, rather, a series of mutual undertakings vouched for in a letter from Clinton to the North Korean dictator, "His Excellency, Kim Jong Il." In the accord, Pyongyang agreed to freeze its declared bomb-building program; the United States agreed to arrange for $4 billion in South Korean and Japanese financing for two light-water nuclear power reactors for the North (which are less conducive to the production of dangerous fissile material). Pending the completion of the reactors, the United States agreed to provide the North with 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil annually, with the hope that friends and allies would absorb much of the expense. Later, when floods and the economics of Communist agriculture produced starvation in North Korea, the United States added food aid to the mix of blandishments it is offering the North. Today, North Korea is the largest recipient of U.S. aid in Asia—more than $160 million this year.

At the time of the Agreed Framework, the North had 8,000 fuel rods containing enough plutonium for five or six nuclear bombs. Most of this material, it is believed, has now been "canned"—rendered inert—and will be shipped out of the country; a large reprocessing facility was shut down. Still, as many recognized at the time of the deal, this is not necessarily the North's entire nuclear inventory. The accord did not require Pyongyang to reveal its nuclear history—how much plutonium it has acquired—until "significant components" of the new reactors are delivered three to four years from now. It is thus likely that, even under the Agreed Framework, North Korea kept enough plutonium for one or two nuclear devices. As a senior administration official concedes: "We agreed to live with one to two bombs at least for a while."

At the time, this may have been the least bad option. But the intervening four years have not borne out the Clinton administration's strategic assumptions. The administration saw the Agreed Framework as a response to two different "threats." The first was nuclear proliferation as such. In those terms, the deal was justified as an effort to bring a rogue nuclear program under at least some form of outside inspection, even if it did not punish past North Korean noncompliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

The second, more controversial, objective of the accord was to engineer a "soft landing" for North Korea's decrepit Stalinist state. The hope was that the Agreed

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Framework would lead to further diplomatic agreements, a formal end to the Korean War, and, eventually, the economic and political opening of the world's most closed society. As President Clinton put it in 1997: "They [North Korea] are better off having agreed to freeze their nuclear program.... And I think they ought to go the next step now and resolve all their differences with South Korea in a way that will permit the rest of us not only to give food aid ... because people are terribly hungry but to work with them in restructuring their entire economy and helping to make it more functional again.... They need to lift the burden of a system that is failing."

And, the administration reasoned, even if neither objective was achieved, the accord would at least buy time until North Korea's internal problems caused it to become militarily weaker or even to collapse. Two days after the accord was signed, *The Washington Post* cited two senior officials as acknowledging they crafted the Agreed Framework "with the eventual dissolution of the present North Korean regime in mind." Shortly before taking office in 1997, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Stanley Roth told a Senate committee: "From a Machiavellian perspective, 'buying time' is in our national interest."

KIM JONG IL BY VINT LAWRENCE FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Yet events suggest that *none* of the Clinton administration's strategic scenarios accords with reality. North Korea is not becoming more open—either to internal economic reform or to rapprochement with the South. The regime shows no signs of imminent collapse. And it may have "sold" the United States only part of its bomb program under the Agreed Framework.

In mid-August, someone with access to U.S. intelligence leaked an extraordinary story to *The New York Times*. At a massive construction site, 25 miles from the North Korean nuclear complex at Yongbyon, some 15,000 workers are building what senior U.S. officials privately say could be new nuclear facilities. In addition, well-placed official sources strongly hint that the North Koreans have at least one other suspected nuclear site.

Then there was the stunner on August 31, when Pyongyang fired a three-stage Taepo Dong 1 missile over Japan; puzzled U.S. intelligence analysts concluded two weeks later that it was, indeed, a failed satellite launch. In two decades of Japan-watching, I have rarely seen the Japanese so jarred by a national security issue. They temporarily broke off all dealings with North Korea. This North Korean technological success came roughly four years earlier than the CIA had forecast. The North has already sold some of its missile technology to Iran and Pakistan. A senior North Korean official intimated to me that Syria and Libya might be next.

The missile launch was part of Pyongyang's lavish double celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of North Korea and the inauguration of Kim Jong Il as successor to his father, Kim Il Sung. As an in-your-face gesture to those predicting Pyongyang's imminent demise, North Korea invited CNN to broadcast the festivities. This, only three weeks after a visiting U.S. congressional staff delegation concluded that up to a million North Koreans have died from famine since 1995. More remarkable still, the missile was fired during talks in New York between the administration's senior Korea hand, Charles Kartman, and North Korea's vice foreign minister, Kim Gye Gwan, about suspected violations of the nuclear accord.

Indeed, virtually all internal trends in North Korea point away from reform and cooperation. The North recently adopted a new constitution that makes the late Kim Il Sung "eternal president" and abolishes the regular position of president, leaving the oddly reclusive Kim Jr. free from dealing with foreigners, since he is not technically the head of state. Rather, he heads the National Defense Committee, reflecting the increased weight of the military in North Korea's new political structure, which effectively bypasses the ruling Korean Worker's Party.

Visiting foreign businessmen report that senior North Korean technocrats involved in a Chinese-type special economic zone in the far northeast corner of the country have disappeared in recent months, and some may have been executed. According to one report, Kim Jong Il visited the zone and, after seeing a couple of Western-style billboards proclaiming the place a "free trade zone," demanded that the word "free" be removed. He then canceled plans to open two port cities as export

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areas. A friend at a Beijing think tank told me that, when a delegation from his institute was invited to Pyongyang, their North Korean counterparts said, in effect, "We have seen what China has accomplished, but we don't think it is sustainable; and we will not do it."

Doctors Without Borders announced in late September that it could no longer operate in North Korea because supplies of food and medicine were not going to those intended but to those favored by the regime. In early October, the United Nations World Food Program warned North Korea that it might refuse to distribute food unless permitted more open access at the distribution sites. One nongovernment activist involved in food aid in North Korea told me: "You can't use the term 'agricultural reform.' They will only allow the word 'adjustment.'"

What is not well understood by many in the United States is that the North Korean regime has survived despite the fact that its economy has already collapsed. What factories have not been dismantled and sold for scrap iron at the Chinese border operate at roughly 20 percent capacity. (Except for military production, which is running at 50 percent capacity, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry.) Analysts of satellite photos of major cities today see that, literally, the lights are going out as the North's power grids degrade. To earn hard currency, Pyongyang relies on missile sales ($508 million in 1987–92), remittances from pro-North Korean groups in Japan, counterfeit U.S. $100 bills, methamphetamine smuggling, and the proceeds from selling commercial airlines the right to fly over North Korean airspace. The economy is reduced to subsistence in rural areas and to relying on various hard-currency schemes to maintain what is left of the cities. With Western and Chinese aid, the North could stagger on this way indefinitely.

Pyongyang is digging in its heels even after the announcement of a conciliatory "sunshine" policy toward the North by South Korea's new president, Kim Dae Jung. A former dissident who is the closest thing Asia has to a Nelson Mandela, Kim has written volumes about possible reunification and has even proposed a confederal system that, on paper, appears not altogether different from that once formally proposed by Kim Il Sung.

While Kim Dae Jung understands the importance of military deterrence and firmly supports the United States-Republic of Korea alliance, he is also concerned about the costs to South Korea in the still-unlikely event that the regime in the North were suddenly to collapse. Facing South Korea's worst economic crisis since the Korean War, he seeks a period of "peaceful coexistence," knowing that, even in the best of times, absorbing a failed North could cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

Which raises an obvious question: If the North refuses to deal seriously with Kim Dae Jung, what South Korean leader would Pyongyang deal with? Rather, the North's rebuff suggests that it views rapprochement with the South as a threat to its very legitimacy and that Kim Jong Il may dream of unifying Korea on his terms.

It also suggests that the regime has been deliberately using negotiations with the United States to extend its life. Officially a humanitarian gesture, American food aid has become a bribe for North Korea to attend meetings that create the impression U.S. diplomacy is working. Each time North Korean diplomats come to New York or Geneva, the administration claims an accomplishment. The most recent—and egregious—example of this approach came during the September talks in New York, when even the discovery of the North's suspect nuclear sites and its missile launch over Japan failed to deter the administration from offering 300,000 tons of food, the largest U.S. donation to North Korea ever.

Assistant Secretary Roth said last year that there is a "security dimension" to putting Pyongyang on life support. "If there is not an international relief effort, North Korea could approach a situation of desperation," Roth said. "If you have twenty-two percent of your population either starving or on the verge of starvation ... who knows what actions North Korea might take if it were desperate?"

This "feed them or they'll kill us" logic is, of course, seriously flawed. It underestimates the continued power of U.S. military deterrence—and presumes some connection between the human misery of North Korea's people and the political stability of the government in Pyongyang. As the starvation of millions in the Ukraine in the 1930s and during Mao Zedong's Great Leap Forward proved, there is no necessary relation between the two under a totalitarian regime. Indeed, if one assumes that the regime is unlikely to channel food to those least favored by the regime (but rather to the army and other loyalists), it might be said that aid helps perpetuate the tyranny in North Korea.

Now Congress is demanding to know what the United States has to show for four years and hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars' worth of "engagement." Yet the administration has not always provided straight answers. It knew of the suspect sites long before telling the appropriate committees of Congress. And, during an August 4 briefing before the U.S. House leadership, Defense Intelligence Agency chief Patrick Hughes actually had to contradict Madeleine Albright when she claimed she had learned about the suspected North Korean underground constructions only three weeks earlier. No, Madame Secretary, Hughes told her, "that is incorrect." She had been told well before that.

A letter from the Republican House Appropriations Committee chairman, Robert Livingston, to national security adviser Sandy Berger illustrates the administration's Korea credibility gap on the Hill. In the document, the soon-to-be Speaker complains that "crucial facts related to this policy are repeatedly misrepresented," adding that "Congress was asked to provide funds [for North Korea] ... based upon inaccurate statements made by senior administration officials." Legislation passed as part of the omnibus appropriations bill now requires Clinton to appoint an outside senior envoy by December

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31 to lead an interagency review of the policy. Well-placed sources say former Defense Secretary William Perry, assisted by General Shalikashvili, are the most likely choices. The budget deal conditions future funds for North Korea on the Clinton administration's written certification, by May 31, that the suspect building sites have been satisfactorily explained—and initial North Korean resistance to U.S. inspection demands suggests difficulty. It also requires the administration to certify that North Korea has stopped all nuclear weapons activities and that it is not selling missiles to nations on the U.S. list of terrorism sponsors. The bill allows the administration to waive these conditions on grounds of national security, but to do so could be politically costly as Campaign 2000 approaches.

If taken seriously by the administration, the new legislation should inspire a rethinking of the policy. No doubt we will be hearing more calls for a preemptive strike against the North in the weeks ahead, but the reality on the ground—including some 75,000 Americans in Seoul on any given day—renders this a far more complex moral and political problem. Indeed, all options are fraught with risk.

The Clinton administration, South Korea, Japan, and China would probably all prefer to muddle through—to avoid a showdown even if it means winking at likely violations of the Agreed Framework by North Korea. On this view, we can live with the one or two bombs North Korea already has, and, even if the North has a covert program, it will take years to produce a large nuclear arsenal.

But how can Congress justify giving taxpayers' money to a repressive regime popping champagne corks as its people starve, and quite possibly cheating on an agreement, and maybe even planning military aggression? Actually, the current predicament is significantly worse than the 1994 crisis. Then, it was possible to give Pyongyang the benefit of the doubt, particularly if it meant the worst case was living with one or two bombs instead of a large arsenal. This time, if the belief of many senior intelligence officials is right and Pyongyang never intended to abandon its large investment in a nuclear weapons program, the question thus arises: Can we do business with this regime at all? Even the man who negotiated the Agreed Framework, Robert Galucci, now dean of Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service, recently told Congress that, if the recently discovered suspect site in the North is part of a covert nuclear weapons program and is not dismantled, "then the Agreed Framework becomes, or should become, a dead letter." This view would imply reverting to a policy of beefed-up military deterrence and a posture of benign neglect toward the North.

Of course, the downside then would be that North Korea would be completely unconstrained by any commitments to the United States and could openly restart its nuclear program. This concern prompts other critics of the policy to propose a solution that amounts to a far more generous—or audacious—offer of engagement to the North than any that has been tried to date.

The premise of this argument is that the United States, because of bureaucratic inertia, inattention at top levels, and conflicts between Congress and the administration, has failed to offer adequate incentives to test Pyongyang's intentions. The North could still be persuaded that its least bad choice is to reform, open up, and become a normative state actor. But the inducements offered so far simply don't make this option worth North Korea's while. What's needed instead is a giant package of economic aid, investment, and diplomatic recognition offered in exchange for equally gigantic North Korean concessions: call it a buyout of the North Korean missile, nuclear, and conventional threats.

Proponents of this view argue that, until the recent string of untoward developments, North Korea had more or less kept its side of the nuclear bargain. But it grew frustrated because the Clinton administration had failed to extract promised fuel-oil funding from Congress and U.S. allies, because the United States added what the North regards as new conditions for easing the U.S. trade embargo, and because construction of the two new reactors is several years behind schedule. Why would the North Koreans give up their nuclear trump card for so little? On this view, the appropriate emblem of U.S. policy failure is not those suspicious photos of a giant underground building site but the towering figure of Michael Ri, a seven-foot-nine-inch-tall North Korean from whom the United States is withholding permission to play in the NBA in order to get more concessions from Pyongyang.

There are two obvious problems with this argument, however. First, it risks giving the North Koreans the impression that defiance gets results. To be sure, recent American dealings with Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein have probably already made that point abundantly clear to Pyongyang. But why should the United States compound the error by repeating it? Second, the "buyout scenario" assumes that the North's leaders are willing to reform and open up, given the right incentives. So far, the evidence is lacking.

The best alternative may be to combine these two options: offer more engagement while threatening more confrontation. Rather than responding to North Korean actions, the United States should lead a united effort with its allies in the region to force Kim Jong Il to choose between cooperation and hostility. The Clinton administration could draw up a roadmap of reciprocal steps—a grand bargain that would, in effect, let North Korea trade the verifiable dismantling of its conventional, nuclear, and missile threats for major economic and political benefits. At the same time, the administration would devise escalatory steps to increase military and economic pressure should North Korea not cooperate. We could, for instance, deny food aid in response to Northern provocations or step up military exercises in the South. In short, a bigger carrot matched by a bigger stick. Of course America should go the extra mile to avoid a bloody war. But, if we do reach the point of unavoidable confrontation with North Korea, it should be on our terms, not theirs. •

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BOOKS & The Arts

Stanley Kauffmann on Films

Irish Interiors

Here is Meryl Streep again. (And, I hope, again and again.) Only a few weeks ago *One True Thing* presented her as an American housewife, with Streep struggling bravely to pry her role free of a cereal ad in a women's magazine. She had more success than the banal role deserved. Now she takes on a much more taxing challenge. She joins a cast of foreign actors and performs as one of the foreign group. In **Dancing at Lughnasa** (Sony Pictures Classics) she is one of five Irish sisters. The other four are played by native Irish actresses, and Streep—a New Jersey lass—comes off as truly Donegal as the rest of them.

Of course, accents have always been relished as chances for virtuosity in the Streep career—Polish in *Sophie's Choice*, Dixie in *Silkwood*, high British in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*—but in few of the past films was she closely surrounded by a cluster of native speakers. Two of the prominent men in the *Lughnasa* cast are also non-Irish—Michael Gambon, playing the priest who is the sisters' brother, is English, and Rhys Ifans, the lover of one of the sisters, is Welsh—and they do well, but they do not need to belong to a tight nuclear group as Streep must and as she flawlessly succeeds in doing. I couldn't help wondering what the Irish women in the cast thought of their American sibling. It's easy to imagine an initial resentment as, for commercial reasons, a Yank film star took the dominant woman's role from an Irish actress; still, it's even easier to imagine how Streep's authenticity won them over. Anyway, imaginings aside, the result is marvelously homogeneous. For the 94 minutes of this film, Streep was born in Ballybeg in Donegal just as surely as her sisters were. Once more in a Streep transmutation, accent is almost the least of it, just one aspect of a created character in every shade of mind and soul.

Pat O'Connor, who directed *Circle of Friends* with warmth and flavor, treats *Dancing at Lughnasa* almost as the product of the Donegal countryside. For O'Connor, the rigor of the story, its rootedness and its attempts to break loose, seem the harvest of the landscape where it happens. (The year is 1936.) Frank McGuinness made the screenplay from Brian Friel's play—the same McGuinness who did the version of *A Doll House* that was on Broadway a few seasons back—and has eased it into its new form with no more "opening up" than is helpful.

Which brings us to Friel's play itself. First, the title. Lugh, pronounced Loo, was the Celtic god of the harvest. Lá Lughnasa, pronounced Loonasa, was the god's feast day and, sixty years ago anyway—which may be one reason why the piece is set back in 1936—was still celebrated in some parts of rural Ireland with bonfires and dancing. Friel's play is not about the survival of paganism, however—not in any deistic sense. It deals with the suppression of earthy instincts and their inevitable explosion, and those instincts are here linked with primitivism. To be natural, the play implies, is to burrow beneath the strictures of our civilization. This theme is signaled at the very start: around the opening credits of this picture about Donegal folk we see African masks and sculptures. The film's license for the African objects comes from Jack, the brother of the five Mundy sisters, a priest who has spent many years in Uganda and, returned to this Donegal cottage somewhat muzzy in his mind, often adverts to his experience of Ugandan rituals.

The Mundy sisters range in age from the twenties well up into the forties, or beyond. Four of them are, presumably, virgins; one of them has a "love child," a boy, but no lover. In fact, during the play the boy's father comes to tell the boy's mother that he's off to fight against Franco in the Spanish Civil War. The youngest sister, who is simple-minded, has a married man tagging after her to console him for his departed wife; she is willing, but her sisters interfere for her own good.

Into this small house of large congested feelings comes the family's first radio. It breaks down, and its repair coincides with a crisis in both the finances of the Mundys and the writhings of buried sexual feelings—along with, in Friel's somewhat patent design, the arrival of Lughnasa. As the radio feeds music into the cottage, one by one the sisters begin to dance, and the climax of the film is this uncharacteristic outburst of near-wild physicality—their own private Lughnasa. The film is able, aptly, to take that dancing outdoors so that they dance on the earth itself. What happens afterward is merely the subsiding of this brief ecstasy: the five sisters settle into lives that differ—but only in kinds of drabness—from their previous lives, as described for us by a voice-over.

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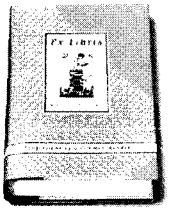

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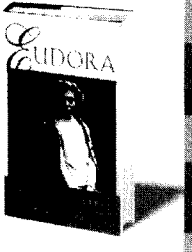

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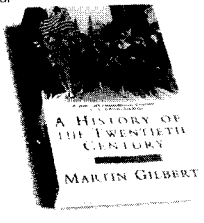

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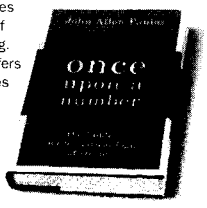

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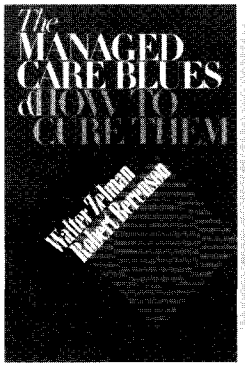

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one-act play, like Synge's *Riders to the Sea* or Frank O'Connor's *In the Train*, but Friel has drawn it out into a full-length work which, for all the crinkle and lilt in some of the dialogue, sags in the middle. Once we know the tension, the unsatisfied hungers among the sisters, we sit around waiting for the explosion. Very little integrated, organic drama grows between the exposition and the explosion. Friel fills in the interim with exploration of characters who are not, as he draws them, deeply explorable. (For instance, he plunks in several minutes with the sisters grouped around a table leafing through an old photo album, just to add body to the piece.) Then, after the outburst of dancing, the film is tied off hastily with that most glib of devices, the voice-over.

And that voice-over itself is strange. It is spoken by a man who was the boy of the story, looking back years later on this summer of 1936. A curious retrospect. We have seen a drama of bitterness, frustration, disintegration; but his memory of that summer, he says, "owes nothing to fact." He remembers it as a time when everyone was "floating on sweet sounds." Either Friel is trying to paint a golden glow on his dark story as it fades away or else he is trying to show us how memory, especially that of childhood, can shape the past the way we wish it had been. But if this latter is really what Friel intended, it makes the body of the play seem all the more attenuated—the lengthy posing of some grimness just so that a man, who was a boy then, can remember it otherwise.

But, Friel apart, the making of the film is impressive. In addition to Streep, her sisters are as vital as the script allows—even a bit more so: Catherine McCormack, Kathy Burke, Sophie Thompson, and (from the play's original cast) Brid Brennan. Michael Gambon, by now a welcome figure, generates a kind of awesome pathos as the priest-brother who comes home dazed by Africa. •

Robert Brustein on Theater

McNally on the Cross

Corpus Christi means, in Latin, the body of Christ. It is also the name of the seaport town in southwestern Texas where Terrence McNally was born and raised. Today, as everyone now knows, the phrase has developed added significance as the name of a play that provoked a blizzard of controversy before it was even read or staged. There has not been so much fury directed toward a piece of theater since the uproar over *The Deputy*, Rolf Hochhuth's indictment of the Vatican's indifference to the Jewish fate in World War II.

McNally's title is aptly chosen. In **Corpus Christi**, he focuses obsessively on the body of Christ—more accurately, on the body parts of Christ—suggesting not only that Jesus and his twelve disciples had sexual appetites just like anybody else but that Jesus and Judas were homosexual lovers. Considering the storm provoked by Martin Scorsese's *The Last Temptation of Christ* for imagining a little hanky-panky between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, this kind of revisionism was destined for trouble, as the sparks fly upward. It certainly reignited the religious right, some of whose more maddened acolytes threatened to bomb the Manhattan Theatre Club (MTC) and kill its directors, Lynne Meadow and Barry Grove. (And people complain about murderous reviews!)

The Manhattan Theatre Club's instinctive reaction was to cancel the production, a decision that led an influential group of theater figures, Athol Fugard among them, to threaten the MTC with artistic quarantine. Terrorized by right-wing death threats, intimidated by left-wing ostracism, bombarded with thundering editorials in *The New York Times*, the MTC finally agreed to let the production proceed, though not before adding a few supernumeraries to the cast, namely police officers and security guards, and bringing in such additional props as guard dogs and metal detectors. *Corpus Christi* opened to nothing more hazardous than barking bullhorns and screeching demonstrators. Nobody bombed it except the critics.

As the director of a theater myself, I would like to believe that I would never bow to pressure and cancel a controversial play. Still, I can understand Lynne Meadow's fears for the safety of her audiences, not to mention her theater, her associates, and herself. Athol Fugard has earned his right to rebuke the MTC by withdrawing a scheduled work from its season; for years he fought against

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repressive forces in South Africa at the risk of his own life. But I wonder whether there wasn't something just a little bit facile in the self-righteous way that the American petitioners proceeded to jump on the MTC. The principle of artistic expression was certainly at stake, but so were human lives. Anyway, the issue is now moot. Free expression has triumphed over censorship and intimidation. The inalienable rights of the artist have been preserved. But given the selective way the First Amendment is interpreted these days, I hope that in future the theater community will be as vigilant in defense of a play that criticizes its favorite causes as of a play that promotes them.

Where Lynne Meadow and her associates can be fairly faulted is in their taste. The critical appetite for McNally's most recent culinary packages (*Lips Together, Teeth Apart, Love! Valour! Compassion!, Master Class*) is not one that I have been able to share; but at least those plays showed McNally's wit. *Corpus Christi* contains all the soft flaws of those canonical gay works with none of their brittle virtues. Please do not understand me too quickly. I have considerable admiration for many gay-oriented plays. Paul Rudnick's satires I find priceless. Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* is an often penetrating look at a universe in which everyone, including the seraphim, seems to be homosexual. Even Larry Kramer's polemics have a passion I can respect. What is considerably less appealing to me is the theatrical marketing of gay self-glorification. *Corpus Christi* is hardly the first time that Jesus has been "outed." Eric Bentley wrote a play about a homoerotic Christ some thirty years ago. But it is undoubtedly the first play in which the playwright seems to have confused the story of Jesus with the story of his own life.

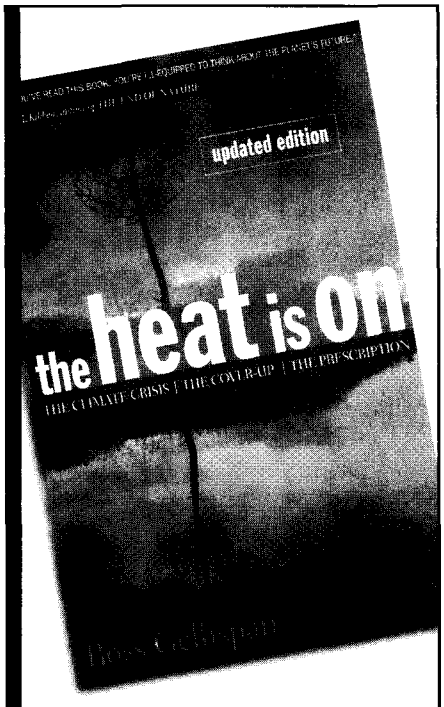
Consider the plot. After announcing that "we are going to tell you an old and familiar story" ("no tricks up our sleeves, no malice in our hearts, we're glad you're here"), thirteen attractive young men come forward to introduce themselves to the audience and, to the sound of rising gorges, to recognize each other's "divinity as a human being." They are all native Texans from McNally's hometown of Corpus Christi, dressed in jeans and T-shirts, plying local professions such as teaching, law, and medicine. One (James) is an architect who designed the Roman cross. Another (Thaddeus) is a hairdresser ("Has anyone got a problem with that?"). Still another (Phillip) is a male hustler. And then there is Judas, whom Jesus loves, whose crowning achievement is, as he says, that "I've got a big dick." There are no women cast in this play (the men play the female parts), and aside from one Asian there are no minorities. The absence of multicultural representation is one of the few ways in which the biblical story has not been schlepped wholesale into the late twentieth century.

True, the character known as Peter is a fisherman, as in the Gospels. And there are other resemblances to the New Testament interspersed among the modern parallels. Indeed, lame as it is, the play even begins to accumulate some power toward the end, when McNally drops his preoccupation with modernizing the action and just tells the gripping story of the crucifixion. For the most part, however, McNally pushes his plot forward with easy anachronistic correspondences. The Virgin Mary gives birth in a motel. The Magi provide her with room service. One of their presents is a Flexible Flyer. The Lord God promises such heavenly sensations as "laughter and friendship and the joy of skinny dipping on a hot summer's day."

Jesus, also known as Joshua, celebrates his thirteenth birthday harassed by a father who wonders why he doesn't "like pussy" or play football. This Jesus is a sensitive lad more interested in Broadway musicals—a form celebrated by D.A. Miller in his new book *Place For Us* as the essential underground home for gay young men. Joshua even gets the chance to sing "I'm in Love with a Wonderful Guy" from *South Pacific*. We may assume that eventually, had he been allowed to live past his thirtieth birthday, Jesus-Joshua might have followed McNally in writing his own musicals. *The Zion King*, perhaps.

Graduating from high school, Joshua is voted "most likely to take it up the Hershey highway." Still, by contrast with Judas, who only likes boys, Joshua is attracted to both boys and girls—in other words, to "people." In the midst of trying to make out with someone of the other sex, he hears hammering. In fact, he hears hammering throughout the play. Only with Judas does he seem to find sexual (though not emotional) fulfillment. Joshua warns him, "You can come no closer to me than your body." Why? It is hard to say, since Judas has shown scant interest in anything else.

Joshua soon begins to perform some miracles. He cures a truck driver of leprosy. He exorcises a demon. He multiplies the fishes. The local doctor is unimpressed ("We don't need Messiahs," he snorts in the only reference to AIDS in the play, "we need cures"). But his young male friends, including Judas, are so overcome by Joshua's dazzling gifts that they kiss his feet. Only one disciple protests—"it reeks of servitude and the language of slaves"—so Joshua proceeds to kiss *his* feet. At this point I longed to



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hear Jackie Mason spritz about gentile foot fetishism ("Jews kiss their mezuzahs, the goyim like to kiss each other's toes"). I was getting so desperate I might even have settled for Nathan Lane.

Then, surprisingly, McNally almost begins to tell the story straight. The language grows more formal, the action more hieratic. Joshua stops going to gay bars and preaches the Sermon on the Mount. (As in *The Life of Brian*, we are too far away to hear it.) He marries James and Bartholomew, thus giving biblical sanction to gay weddings. He excoriates the homophobic clergy ("all the fag-haters in the priests' robes"), while noting that the hammering has stopped. It will begin again when he is nailed to the cross.

At the Last Supper, Joshua observes that "one of you will betray me." It turns out to be the guy with the cigarette, the one chewing on the matzoh. Losing courage, Joshua tells his disciples that he is frightened of dying. He is brought before Pilate, who asks him: "Art thou a queer?" (Joshua answers: "Thou sayest I am.") One of Joshua's high school girlfriends has her knuckles rapped by a Catholic teacher at the moment that he is being whipped. He is attired in a purple robe, crowned with thorns, hailed as "the King of the Queens," and laid upon the cross. The thirteen actors come downstage to address the audience: "The son of man will come at the time ye least expect him." I think that we still have some time to wait. What sprang into my head was that old wheeze about John Wayne playing a Roman soldier in some biblical epic by Cecil B. DeMille, who, having been asked to speak his one line with a little more awe, drawled, "Awwww, truly he is the son of God."

Joe Mantello has guided his thirteen actors through this modern misery play with considerable grace, and the actors maintain considerable dignity speaking some pretty awkward dialogue. For *Corpus Christi* is show biz at its most pretentious and its most self-important. Homosexuals have suffered a great deal in our country. The most recent outrage, where a gay man in Wyoming was lashed to a fence and pistol-whipped to death, bore an uncanny resemblance to a crucifixion. One could imagine a play that compared the suffering of an innocent victim such as Matthew Shepard to the passion of Jesus. But identifying homosexual persecution with the fate of Jesus is not quite the same as inventing equivalences between the life of Jesus and the career of a successful Broadway playwright. •

Mindy Aloff on Dance

Swan Dive

Toward the end of Matthew Bourne's **Swan Lake**, currently at the Neil Simon Theater, the Prince—so sickened with guilt and humiliation at his own betrayal of the Swan that he has dreamed himself onto the operating table of a psychiatric chop doctor—lies in his outsized bed ready to die. And die he will, but not quite yet. He must first have one more encounter with the swans whose leader he has betrayed. At a breath, three of them pop out from under his bed. They emerge from his pillows, writhing, the tendrilous feathers of their swan pants commingling like lice. Then, in the most magical moment of this two-and-a-half-hour show, they fly onto the edge of his bed, over and over, alighting there not so much like swans (who drop their feet in advance of landing, like an airplane lowering its wheels) as like crickets, lightly and dryly, with no visible preparation or landing shock.

It is a stomach-curdling and utterly fascinating physical sequence, one of the finest distillations of pure revulsion that I have ever seen in the theater. At this moment, one can glimpse the power of the visions that Bourne must have experienced in the preparation of this work. Indeed, had the entire production sustained this level of visual and visceral interest, I would have been persuaded to welcome to the world of dance a new Kafka. And the fact that Bourne is not a figure of that magnitude, at least here, is almost a relief. A first-rate dance intelligence that decided to dismantle *Swan Lake* once and for all would be among the more terrifying deconstructionists of the century.

Instead Bourne turns out to be one more *enfant terrible* in a decade that has yet to produce an *enfant merveilleux*. He may yet bring forth a creation that, in his words, would wipe out other people's ideas of an older work and put his stamp on it instead, but I am happy to report that the cleansing process in his *Swan Lake* is far from complete. The show is entertainingly outrageous, sufficiently streamlined to keep one awake, and borne along by childhood resentments and outlaw impulses that an entire generation of audiences, raised on pop music and Freddy Kruger movies, is gobbling up like Halloween candy. It is a world that can simultaneously contain the notion of the annihilation of life on the planet and the notion that everything could be fixed if you simply resolved to give somebody a hug every day.

It is, in other words, an adolescent's world; and since the adolescent has apparently internalized fine ballet, modern dance, stage musicals, movies, and photography, bringing forth bits and pieces of what he has loved in elaborately thrown-away contexts and settings, even a contrarian critic cannot help but be touched by the effort, and by its message that we need more physical displays of affection in our lives. Still, sympathy with the message is different from admiration for the means. After seeing two performances of *Swan Lake*, with cast changes in the principal roles, I just don't like how it works.

Briefly, what one sees is more or less the old familiar plot, more or less set in the 1950s (somehow a 1960s-era Warhol silkscreen makes an entrance), with the swan roles performed by men appearing as men and with classical ballet technique mocked outright (in a ballet-within-the-show) or so simplified and homogenized (as in the dances for the swans) that it is more of a historical reference than a practical instrument. The Prince turns out to be something of a historical reference, also, a comic-book version of the doomed prince in Kenneth Macmillan's *Mayerling*, except that he is shorn of the Macmillan character's aristocratic sensitivity and leeched of his capacity for rage.

On the other hand, he is also the prince that this kingdom deserves. As Bourne has constructed the court, it is one step away from a Marx Brothers movie. (Margaret Dumont as the Queen Mother, Groucho as the Prince, Harpo as the Swan.) The only royal issues at stake are who is going to break a bottle of champagne over the new ships or sit where in the royal box. In such a construction, who cares whether the Prince produces an heir or not?

When the question of the continuation of the royal line becomes a joke—as it is here almost from the beginning—the entire point of staging *Swan Lake* becomes reduced to a series of one-liners. Peter Anastos and Mikhail Baryshnikov

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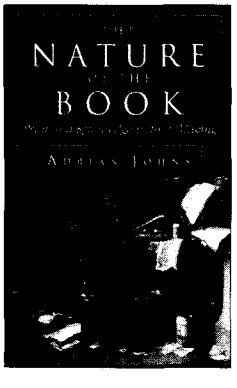

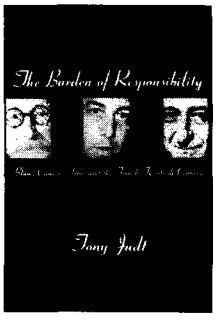

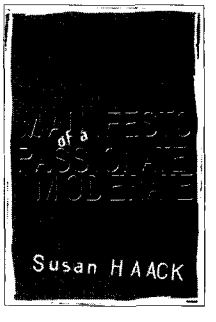

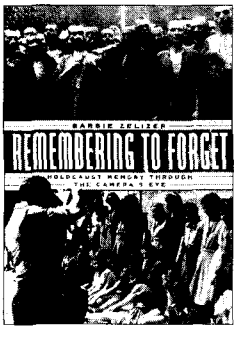

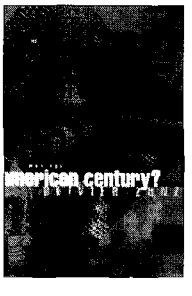

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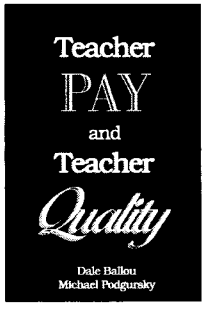

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explored this in 1987 with their lighthearted picture-book *The Swan Prince: A Fairytale*, featuring photographs by Arthur Elgort. The swans there are still women—fashion models, in fact (the feature first appeared in an issue of *Paris Vogue* that Baryshnikov guest-edited); but the notion here of the Prince as an overgrown crybaby is not too far from Bourne's rendering. The major difference in imagery, apart from the appearance of Baryshnikov as the Prince, is that in Bourne's staging the book's ironies about the Prince are presented as earnest reasons for the audience's empathy. A staged Elgort photo of Baryshnikov tied to a tree in a forest and punctured by swan feathers, à la Saint Sebastian, is captioned, scathingly, "But Siegfried felt like a Swan-Martyr." In the first lakeside scene of Bourne's show, the swans introduce the Saint Sebastian imagery as part of their dance identity, and the Prince eventually adopts it as well.

How far the dance world has traveled since 1987! Baryshnikov, Anastos, and Elgort donated their entire earnings from their book to the American Foundation for AIDS Research. These days Broadway audiences are asked to accept a similar skewering of the ballet in a more vulgar style, and to find a moral in it, and in the process to help along Bourne's career in commercial theater. We get the dances we deserve, too. Or perhaps the dance direction. Bourne is listed as director in addition to choreographer, while two other individuals (Etta Murfitt and Ginger Thatcher) are listed as assistant choreographers, and a third (Iain Webb) is listed as assistant choreographer to the principals. Bourne may prove to be a *wunderkind*, but the *wunder* here is certainly of a lesser order than that of, say, Jerome Robbins.

Bourne's *Swan Lake* arrives on Broadway after several years of heated anticipation. American dancegoers have been hearing about it since its smash success in London three years ago, first at Sadler's Wells and then at a commercial house in the West End, which was followed, in 1996, by an Olivier Award for outstanding achievement in dance. The move from the not-for-profit realm to the commercial one—Twyla Tharp's *The Catherine Wheel* was the last such dance experiment to make it in New York, and that was in the early 1980s—was apparently the inspiration of Cameron Mackintosh, who is producing the show on Broadway and who was in its opening-night audience at Sadler's Wells. "He came up to me and said, 'This is fabulous,'" Bourne explained in an interview. "'You've got to do this on the West End. It feels like a musical. It's got all the things that I would expect a hit musical to have.'" With the encouragement of Mackintosh, *Swan Lake* moved. "He didn't produce it then, as he is now," Bourne added, "but he helped behind the scenes with advice and gave us free management services. He wasn't credited, just thanked." Did Mackintosh, a successful and well-respected producer of hit musicals, contribute to the exceptionally tight pacing of *Swan Lake*, and perhaps to its Grand Guignol atmosphere in a few scenes—more evocative of other Mackintosh musicals (*The Phantom of the Opera*, *Miss Saigon*) than of any traditional staging of the ballet or of other previous modern-dance experiments in reconceiving nineteenth-century classics (such as Mark Morris's *The Hard Nut*, which sets *The Nutcracker* in 1950s suburbia, or Mats Ek's *Giselle*, which sets the white act with the Wilis in an insane asylum)?

Bourne's show contains a persistent quality of iron-clad suspense followed by reductively clear resolution that is inimical to the way that concert-stage choreographers tend to think. His stated appreciation of the films of Hitchcock might account for the presence of this plot logic, but not for its working out in nearly every staging detail. Consider only a cameo role: when the Hungarian Princess with the eyepatch (Sarah Barron) extrudes her tongue and traces an "O" around her lips to signal her taste for the arm-licking Swan in his black-leather incarnation during the Royal Ball, she does so in exactly the same way and at the same rate regardless of whether the dancer inhabiting those trousers is Adam Cooper or Will Kemp, who are quite unlike in their stage presence, their technical ability, their physiognomy, and their musculature. This artistic indifference disguised as artistic consistency is the sort of control of the performance-as-product that is a hallmark of Broadway, especially in economically trying times, when most audiences can only afford to see a Broadway show once, and so the show becomes a kind of commodity that must conform in the smallest ways to the entity that is advertised and discussed by reviewers. Words permit actors and singers to keep their performances fresh in this situation, but in dance it is stultifying and unmusical.

The most difficult thing to accept about Bourne's *Swan Lake* is that it makes Tchaikovsky's score sound banal. I am not speaking of the musical performance of what is played; the pit musicians, conducted by the experienced ballet conductor David Frame, produce intonations and rhythms of

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which they can be proud. Unfortunately, their good work has been undercut in two ways: by the version of the score that they perform and by the manner in which the stage events subject that version to a brutal humor, sending up its melodies, its accents, and its soaring climaxes with jack-in-the-box jokes that rob the music not only of mystery but also of air.

This happens from the very beginning, when Tchaikovsky's overture is roped into the service of a dream scene. That is, one never hears the music without the production's half nelson around its neck, so to speak. (There may be business reasons for this: the use of the overture to get the story rolling helps to cut down the spectacle's running time to an acceptable Broadway length. Most traditional productions of *Swan Lake* run three hours with two intermissions.) David Cullen, an arranger for Andrew Lloyd Webber, Tina Turner, and Barbra Streisand, has subjected what we do hear to "orchestrations," which may help to account for certain curtailed and treacly musical moments that serve the stage action adroitly yet suffocate the ineffable atmosphere of the composer.

Weighed against the disheartening sound of audiences snickering to Tchaikovsky's music, the production's questionable rendering of the iconography of real swans seems comparatively trivial. Bourne has said that he was moved to cast male dancers as swans because of his observation that real swans are capable of muscular and frightening violence. (He cited a film in which a swan attacks a boat.) He has also spoken about the influence of Hitchcock's *The Birds*. For what it's worth, the particular violence that Bourne imagines—in which the flock of swans turn on their leader, peck him to death, and seem actually to feed on his body—is one more theatrical distortion, manufactured to serve very human obsessions. It turns out that this show is not unkind only to *Swan Lake*, it is unkind also to swans.

There are eight types of swans in the world, and it is not clear which one Bourne means to invoke. The dancers' make-up, with a black streak down the forehead, could refer either to the Mute Swan, the most frequently mythologized type, or to the Whooper Swan, named by Linnaeus *Cygnus cygnus*, after a son of Apollo who was transformed into a swan on throwing himself into a lake. In 1990, Janet Kear, a director of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Center in Martin Mere, England, published *Swans*, a graceful and informative essay on swans and swan imagery, with photographs by Teiji Saga.

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Contributors: *Manfred Berg, Alan Brinkley, Arif Dirlik, Jerzy Eisler, Carole Fink, Philipp Gassert, Ingrid Gilcher-Holtey, George C. Herring, Stuart J. Hilwig, Gerd Rainer Horn, Konrad H. Jarausch, Detlef Junker, Mark Kramer, Diane B. Kunz, Claus Leggewie, Bernhard Maleck, Eva Maleck-Lewy, Harold Marcuse, Gottfried Niehart, Chester J. Pach Jr., Nancy B. Tucker, Lawrence Wittner*

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ART SCENES *galleries, exhibits, and events*

SWANN GALLERIES 104 East 25th Street, New York, NY, 212-254-4710. Monday - Friday, 10 AM - 6 PM. Selected auctions: November 19th, 10:30 AM: *Rare Books:* featuring Illuminated Manuscripts. Illustrated catalogue $25. November 19th, 2:00 PM: *Early Printed Books from the Libary of Arthur Mullin of Santa Barbara*: catalogue $10. December 3rd, 10:30 AM: *Maps & Atlases, Decorative Graphics, Ephemera*: Illustrated catalogue $25. December 10th, 10:30 AM: *Sets and Decorative Bindings* and *Sporting Books*: catalogue $10. January 7th, 10:30 AM: *Printed and Manuscript Americana*: Early American Religion, Samuel Cooper's copy of the Treaty of Paris, Important Civil War archive. Illustrated catalogue $25. Please write or call for preview hours, quarterly newsletter with full auction schedule.

BONNI BENRUBI GALLERY, INC. 52 East 76th Street, New York, NY 10021, 212-517-3766, fax: 212-288-7815. *Abelardo Morell: New Work*: October 22nd - December 5th. This exhibition includes new work made within the last two years and features 2 new bodies of work. Photographs for the reissue of the classic Lewis Carroll *Alice in Wonderland* book published by Dutton and photographs made during a fellowship at The Gardner Museum in Boston. This gallery specializes in 20th century and contemporary photographs including Tom Baril, Louis Stettner, Andreas Feininger, Lewis Hine, Jed Devine and many others.

FIRST STREET GALLERY 560 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, 212-226-9127. Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM. *Maureen Mullarkey: New Figure Paintings*: This exhibition extends motifs that have occupied the artist for several years: the female nude and sexually ambiguous males. The work is classical, not in its subjects but in its sanity and reticence. November 10th - December 5th. Followed by *Group Show of Gallery Artists*: December 8th - January 2nd.

ANITA SHAPOLSKY GALLERY 152 East 65th Street, New York, NY 10021, 212-452-1094, fax: 212-452-1096. Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM. *Artists of the 50s: The Development of Abstraction*: Amaranth Ehrenhalt, Will Barnet, Seymour Boardman, Ilya Bolotowsky, Ernest Briggs, Larry Calcagno, Nassos Daphnis, Joseph Fiore, Sidney Geist, Stanley William Hayter, Buffie Johnson, Ibram Lassaw, Michael Loew, Jeanne Miles, Kyle Morris, Ethel Schwabacher, Yvonne Thomas. November 14th - January 16th, 1999: A selection from the period, these artists' active involvement in the development of Abstraction in New York in the 1950s was widely recognized at the time and has had a lasting influence on succeeding generations. The diversity of works shown here is united by dedication to challenge the energies and ideas of the mind. This show invites the viewer to engage in a historical perspective and to recognize the contemporary vigor of these works.

ATELIER A/E 323 West 22nd Street (8th & 9th Avenues), New York, NY 10011, 212-620-8103, fax: 212-620-8106.
To January 24th, 1999: *Intensified Realities*: Still Lifes & Landscapes by *Robert Kogge*. Intricate Acrylics by *Mary Larue Wells*. Sculptures (complicated boxes) by *David Kooi*.

ROBERT KLEIN GALLERY 38 Newbury Street, Boston, MA 02116, 617-267-7997. E-mail: rlklein@tiac.net, Web: www.robertkleingallery.com. October 30th - November 28th: *Photographs by Denny Moers*. Twenty years experience, an extensive collection and broad expertise in 19th and 20th century classic and contemporary photographs. Featuring work by Ansel Adams, Charles Sheeler, Edward Weston, Tom Baril, Helev Levitt, Denny Moers, W.H. Fox Talbot, Eugene Atget, Diane Arbus, Herb Ritts, Sally Gall, Susan Unterberg, Irving Penn, Clarence White and many more....

***Please turn to page 43 for more* ArtScenes.**

In this eye-opening book, Kear examines each stage of the Whooper Swan's life cycle—noting, for instance, that when these swans fight among themselves "fights can last for several minutes and involve the adult birds beating their opponents with the 'wrists' of their wings and biting their shoulders, while cygnets and other group members shout abuse." She adds, however, that "injury is almost never caused because one party gives in and swims away in submissive posture."

Even the most strongly territorial type of swan on earth, the Mute Swan, whose males will ferociously attack other male swans intruding on their nesting areas, engage only in one-to-one combat, and then only in the immediate vicinity of their nests. As Sylvia Bruce Wilmore wrote in 1974 in *Swans of the World*, now the classic reference on the subject: "Once the aggressor is outside his territory, he will draw his feathers close to his body in the submissive posture which he uses in time of fear or when mating." Which is to say, they do not, en masse, reenact *Mutiny on the Bounty* or *Suddenly Last Summer*.

All swans can be vicious against intruders from other species, and there is an obvious reason for it: they mate in pairs, almost always monogamously and for life, and they live primarily to bear and to raise young, whom they protect to the death. As any version of the Petipa-Ivanov ballet shows, the most deadly threats to all swans are human beings, who have hunted them for centuries to the point of extinction, and who continue to assault them today with environmental wastes. The idea of imperiled future generations, which is the invisible engine of most *Swan Lake* productions, is central to the tragedy of the ballet's story.

Even the pure love-tragedy versions, such as Balanchine's one-act reduction that collapses the two lakeside scenes and scraps the court altogether, or his experimental sequence for the movies in the 1940s, retain the element of fairy-tale innocence by means of miniaturization, such as the toylike swan figures that open and close the stage version. Bourne has gone further. He has made the Prince himself a victimized child, and the swan flock not enchanted human maidens, or disguised gods, or angels—all ancient swan associations—but rather a bestial male gang who have no prospect of reproducing their kind.

For the sake of a hug, then, he sacrifices a great deal. But I am not his intended audience. As he has observed, "I hope we get a theater audience—and not just the dance crowd—because that's what it's aimed at. People who come to

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see it are not used to dance productions. They see it's called *Swan Lake*, they hear it's dance, and they say, 'No, I don't go to that,' so it needs that friend to tell them, 'I've seen it, and you've got to see it' to make them go." His show has found many friends on both sides of the Atlantic, and one dissenting view isn't going to drown them out. Still, if this is your *Swan Lake*, you are welcome to it. •

Jed Perl on Art

Pollock Fever

For a few weeks this fall, Manhattan has been hosting a homecoming celebration for the Abstract Expressionists. As Jackson Pollock's first New York retrospective in thirty years opened at the Museum of Modern Art, the Mark Rothko show was still up at the Whitney. In addition, the Modern was offering a substantial selection of New York School works on paper; Willem de Kooning was the focus of three exhibitions, at the Drawing Center and the Mitchell-Innes & Nash and Matthew Marks galleries; and the Gagosian Gallery had mounted a major Arshile Gorky show. With all of this going on, there was a feeling in the air that the Class of '48—the group of artists who had hit their stride and done much of their best work before the half-century mark—was having a fiftieth reunion bash. And the tone of the talking and the writing that greeted these events was shot through with the kind of strong, sometimes colliding feelings that such gone-are-the-days get-togethers almost invariably inspire.

The Abstract Expressionists are storied figures, and when people reflect on their achievements, painting is rarely all that they have in mind. For artists and writers who are finding their post-'60s American lives somewhat banal, the whole Abstract Expressionist era can become a fantasy vision of the creative life, a glorious combination of quirky individualism, dangerous exploits, and establishment success. If men are the ones doing the fantasizing, they may seem to be identifying with their guy-idols as they mull over the mysteries of genius and the possibility of second and third acts in American art. Of course, things were rarely simple for the Abstract Expressionist painters. But their hardscrabble struggles in a Depression America that had little use for modern art are nowadays regarded as having a sort of Horatio Alger charm. And although these painters took an active role in the postwar glamorization of art—which unhinged some of their lives before turning the whole scene upside down—if you dare point this out you may well be accused of refusing to feel their pain.

It seems that contemplating the Class of '48—the year of Gorky's suicide and thus the beginning of a whole string of untimely deaths—means staring at the foundations of your own ambitions, and that can get mighty confusing. This is a confusion that the artists' most ardent supporters seem to enjoy. Kirk Varnedoe, the Chief Curator of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at the Modern, who organized the Pollock retrospective, has composed a very deft catalog essay, in which the quality of the work, the artist's moods, and how much money he was making are discussed practically in the same breath. Varnedoe is aware that there is a danger of the myth overtaking the man. He also rather enjoys that kind of late-night bull-session confusion. And the confusion is somehow wrapped up with the very ethos of the paintings.

Sometime in the middle of the 1940s, many of these artists began to paint with an all-in-one impact in mind, and over the years, and not necessarily through any fault of their own, this spawned an all-in-one way of thinking and talking about art. You can see how the singularity of a Pollock drip painting or a Rothko with a couple of soft-edged rectangles came out of a hard-fought search for clarity, but the interesting unilateralism of these late-'40s effects could inspire dangerously unilateral reactions in the audience, and among admirers of the work the result was an especially vehement kind of are-you-with-us-or-are-you-against-us rhetoric. The Abstract Expressionist paintings that have been most celebrated since the '50s emphasize image and force over the particularities of internal structure. Perhaps these extremist statements were fueled by a dedication to the basic logic of painting, but the New York School artists who in the '50s and '60s worried about a coarsening of the language and were inclined to reemphasize the particularities were

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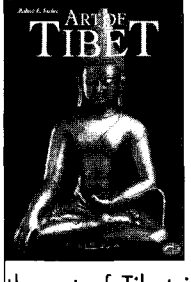

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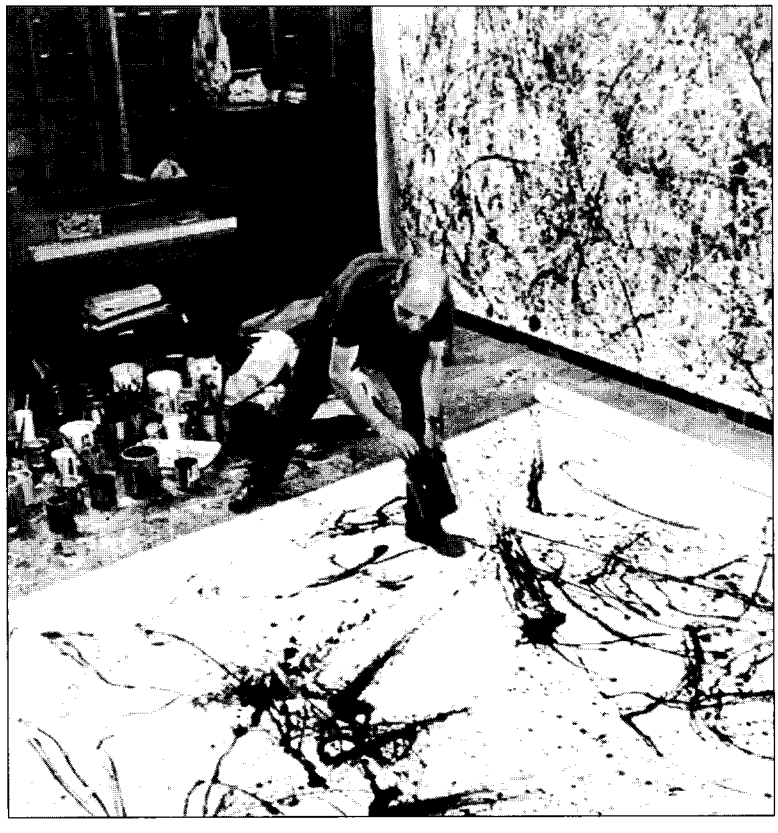
often perceived as being cut off not only from whatever future was left to painting, but also from a new understanding of its past.

While the Abstract Expressionists believed in the freestanding value of a work of art, they came before the public when the New York theater was in its postwar golden age, and a romantic feeling for the artist as actor was pretty much taken for granted. The whole question was what you did with that feeling, and the answer went way beyond Pollock's habit of getting into a Marlon Brando pose when photographers were around. For the Founding Fathers of the New York School, the slippery slope that led from art-as-art to art-as-act to art-as-life was one that they negotiated with as much cynicism as wisdom, and with only a sporadic sense of what might ultimately be involved. The rejection of part-to-part distinctions in favor of a monolithic image could seem like an attractive way of turning a painting into a one-track soliloquy performed on a virtually empty stage. And that left the audience free to think about everything and anything—which meant wondering about the artist who had engineered the act, and once you started wondering about the artist, you might find that you were really wondering about yourself.

Kirk Varnedoe wonders if Pollock, who never even went to college, is some kind of renegade letterman hero. He reaches for metaphors that put Pollock in a school-days context. Writing of *Mural*, which Pollock painted in 1943–44 for Peggy Guggenheim's foyer, he explains that Pollock at last "stood alone at the head of the class." In *A Fine Disregard*, Varnedoe's 1990 book about modern art, the guiding conceit is a kind of existentialized rugby game, and at the end there is a Hans Namuth photograph of Pollock painting to accompany Varnedoe's announcement that "You pick it up"—the "it" being some grand mystery—"and run with it." For the title of his catalog essay, Varnedoe seizes on the title of a 1947 painting as a sort of nickname, *Comet*, that he must feel is just right for the conquering hero of the Class of '48. And when Varnedoe really wants to get serious, he has the college athlete go off and conquer the world. "Any theory of cultural modernity," Varnedoe explains, "has to claim the summit [Pollock] occupies before it can assert dominion on the territory."

In this kind of hyperpersonalized atmosphere, even the most limited observation about a formal matter can be read as a pronouncement about success and failure, life and death. At the Rothko retrospective, which opened at the National Gallery last spring and has been at the Whitney Museum of American Art this fall, visitors move through the galleries quietly; they are feeling introspective. They are obviously responding to the slowed-down, shimmering near-symmetry of the work. Rothko wants us to rid our minds of particular thoughts, so that we can focus on the incantatory power of a few elemental color impressions. The danger with this kind of unbounded experience is that viewers' minds eventually begin to wander, and pretty soon they find themselves thinking about the man and his depression and his suicide. Ultimately they may not know whether it is the art or the life that interests them more. Sometimes museumgoers seem to be inclined to regard Abstract Expressionist paintings as nothing but visual demonstrations of the indomitable power of a battered ego.

Art becomes psychodrama, and any experience of the work becomes a form of psychologizing. You are left rooting for the painting as if you were rooting for a person. Even Gorky's brainily deliberate variations on a series of beloved Picasso themes, done in the '30s and included in the beautiful show at Gagosian, tend to be viewed as foreshadowing his suicide a decade later. The inept cartoonish drawings and sculptures that are in some of the current de Kooning shows are regarded less as independent assertions than as extenuating circumstances with commercial value. As for the canvases that de Kooning did in the '80s when he was suffering from Alzheimer's, the responses of museumgoers can become almost loonily personal, as if their admiration for these sloppily repetitive paintings brought some assurance that age and illness could be vanquished by a few passes of the brush.



Courtesy Museum of Modern Art

JACKSON POLLOCK PAINTING *AUTUMN RHYTHM*, 1950
PHOTOGRAPH BY HANS NAMUTH

Kirk Varnedoe's survey of Jackson Pollock's career is paced slowly, under the general principle that we will want to savor every moment. The show, which spans a working life of little more than twenty years, takes up most of the third floor of the museum. This minimalist hanging, with plenty of empty wall space, is closer to a fashionable contemporary art gallery installation than to any treatment that Pollock probably received while he was alive. The effect is to give Pollock's jazzy moves a contemplative aura. Varnedoe, who from the evidence of his catalog sees the early Pollock as less a raw talent than an as-yet-untapped talent, keeps to a minimum the coarse emotional impact of Pollock's early essays in the styles of the Mexican muralists and of Thomas Hart Benton, who was both a teacher and a friend.

The Pollock of Varnedoe's show is deliberate and ever-confident; he is an austere master. The spare hanging can give Pollock's works a tightly focused look, even when what's going on in the paintings tells us otherwise. The more rough-and-tumble Picasso-influenced work that Pollock was doing in the mid-'40s, when he was exhibiting at Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century, gains a semblance of control. *The Moon Woman* (1942), which is overheated

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ART SCENES *galleries, exhibits, and events*

ROBERT MILLER GALLERY 41 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, 212-980-5454. Tuesday - Saturday 10 AM - 6 PM.
November 18th - January 9th, 1999: *Ena Swansea: Paintings*. For her first extensive exhibition at the Robert Miller Gallery, Ena Swansea has painted new canvases that may be likened to back-lit apparitions of foliage upon illuminated screens. On first glance, her paintings seem almost monochromatic, but upon closer inspection, they vibrate with color, as do shadows in twilight.
Drawing: An Essay—with works by Jacob El Hanani, Simon Frost, Eva Hesse and Kathy Prendergast. This show looks at drawing as a process—one of trial and experimentation that combines the ancient rituals of self-expression and repetition. Each artist presents a different aspect of the task, sometimes focusing on line, sometimes on the process of documentation.
November 18th - January 5th, 1999: *Alison Wilding: A Project, 1998*. When the sculptor Alison Wilding arrives at a successful juxtaposition of formal and material combinations, she says that she has located a switch and that the work has been turned on. The rubber carpets and silk pieces in this exhibition are wonderful examples of work that has been switched on by Wilding.

GALLERY TARANTO is proud to present *"Time's Promise, Paris to Prague,"* a photographic exhibition of black and white, color and Iris images compiled over the past five years by Blanche Mackey in her travels throughout Europe, primarily Paris and Prague. *"Time's Promise, Paris to Prague"* opens Thursday, December 3rd, 1998, at Gallery Taranto, 39 West 14th Street in New York City, and will remain on view until Saturday, January 9th, 1999. Gallery hours are: Monday through Friday, 9 AM - 7 PM, and Saturday 11 AM - 5 PM. An opening reception will be held on Friday, December 4th from 7 PM - 9 PM. Contact: Lorena La Grassa, 212-691-6070.

LEICA GALLERY 670 Broadway, Suite 500, New York, NY 10012, 212-777-3051. Tuesday through Friday, 11 AM - 6 PM; Saturday 12 NOON - 6 PM.
Main Gallery: *Grace Robertson: British Photography in the Fifties*. Each week in the 1950s, in England's *Picture Post*, Robertson detailed British life through her photographs. Her work "is a national family album of Britons, playing themselves." These images capture the streets and nightlife of London, Brighton dance halls, the Tate Gallery and, her most famous series, Mother' Pub Outings.
Oskar Barnack Room: *Erich Lessing: Vintage Prints of the Hungarian Revolution*. For the first time in New York City, the vintage photographs of the Hungarian Revolution—of the Magnum photographer, Erich Lessing, are gathered together. All of the photographs of Robertson and Lessing are available for sale and both shows run through December 5th.

O.K. HARRIS WORKS OF ART 383 West Broadway, New York, NY, 212-431-3600, fax: 212-925-4797.
November 21st - January 2nd (closed from December 25th - January 1st):
Steven Montgomery: Ceramic sculpture of industrial subjects, large in scale and surprisingly complex for the medium of clay. This work replicates fictitious machinery in varying states of decomposition and transformation.
Shimon Okshteyn: Imposing, graphite drawings of antique (1920s–1940s) alarm clocks, typewriters, a telephone, a fan and a table top juke box.
D.J. Hall: Paintings and intimate-scaled panels portraying women luxuriating in tropical seaside settings bathed in evocative summer light.
Masami and Masaaki Sato: A husband and wife collaboration: Masami created three-dimensional boxed constructions based on Masaaki's New York Newsstand paintings.
Mark Heyer: Faux naïve paintings that combine customized 19th-century methods and techniques with American scenes and themes.

HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY 120 Wooster Street, New York, NY 10012, 212-334-0010, fax: 212-941-7479. Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM.
Through December 5th, *Arthur Leipzig: A World View*. A retrospective featuring vintage photographs from Leipzig's long career and fascination with the city of New York as well as his travels as a photojournalist.
December 11th - January 23rd, 1999, *Kenro Izu: Still Life*. An exhibition of platinum prints concurrent with the release of a major monograph by Arena Editions.

JULIE SAUL GALLERY 560 Broadway, New York, NY 10012, 212-431-0747, fax: 212-925-3491. Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM.
October 22nd - November 28th, *Bill Jacobson: Thought Series*: His third solo show poetically explores the body with close-up portraiture of the face and body's landscape. Also included are new nature photographs of water and grass.
December 3rd - January 16th, *Skin/Deep: A Survey of Interior Imaging from X-Ray to MRI*: The third in a series of historical photographic surveys considering the treatment of a scientific subject through time, and the attendant technical and aesthetic evolution. This exhibition includes both vintage and contemporary work by artists using X-ray technology. Robert Rauschenberg, Vik Muniz, Andrew Bush, Isa Genzken, Helmut Newton, an installation by Australian artist Justine Cooper and others.

BROOKE ALEXANDER EDITIONS 59 Wooster Street, New York, NY 10012, 212-925-4338, fax: 212-941-9565, e-mail: brookealex@earthlink.net. Tuesday - Saturday, 11 AM - 6 PM. Exhibition: November 21st - January 16th: *Rémy Zaugg: "The Carnegie Works."* New Editions available: Uta Barth, Charles Long, Jorge Pardo, Richard Tuttle, Nicola Tyson, Franz West.

***Please turn to page 45 for more* ArtScenes.**

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and junky, looks almost dignified in this chic context. And by the time that we have arrived at the poured-paint works of 1947, the mood in the show is awestruck, unnaturally pristine. The homecoming hagiography is beginning to take on religiose strains.

This is an idol-worshiper's installation; every painting is an occasion to bow down. Since we are aware that the hero is going to come to a bad end—in August 1956, when he crashes his car into a tree, killing himself and Edith Metzger, a friend of his girlfriend Ruth Kligman—there is the possibility of viewing the entire retrospective as a kind of art-world Stations of the Cross. This culminates in the trinity formed by *Number 32, 1950, One: Number 31, 1950,* and *Autumn Rhythm,* the three huge drip paintings, each between fifteen and seventeen and a half feet wide. After that, Pollock descended into what eventually amounted to a six-year binge, and Varnedoe goes into his relic-gathering phase.

As we approach the last two galleries of the show, we can take a side trip, and study a video monitor which plays Hans Namuth's 1950 films of Pollock painting, and then step inside a full-scale replica of the artist's studio in The Springs, Long Island. Although the distressed wood walls of Pollock's modest work space have been meticulously rendered, Varnedoe stopped short of attempting to recreate the famous splatters of paint on the floor. Varnedoe must love those spatters; he used a color photograph of the studio floor as the frontispiece of his catalog essay, where it looks like the documentation for a very early example of site-specific art. But he probably regarded any attempt to reproduce that floor—which can still be seen in The Springs—as a kind of forgery verging on sacrilege. In any event, at the Museum of Modern Art this bogus studio functions as a Holy of Holies that you can enter at no extra cost. If it's not too crowded when you visit the show, you might even be able to prance around in there, mimicking the moves that Pollock makes in the twenty-three Namuth photographs that are mounted on the walls. It's a Generation-X-meets-Generation-Ab-Ex kind of thing. And surely Varnedoe is aware that this replica has a '90s installation-art look; the wood shed could be interpreted as a cleaned-up version of some of the sex-and-murder installations that the Los Angeles artist Paul McCarthy has inflicted on gallerygoers in recent years.

So what does it all add up to? Pollock strikes me as an artist with an interesting, unruly talent, who after 1945 was able to distill that unruliness and achieve some dense, poignant effects. By the end of the '40s, however, a lot of the effects are to my way of thinking becoming overly regularized. The technique of dripping or flinging paint, which Pollock borrowed from the Surrealists and at first used to suggest loopy unfolding journeys, all too rapidly became repetitive, a maze of lines that close the paintings down. At his absolute best, in the very restrained *Cathedral* (1947), Pollock is an artist with a fine-tuned lyric gift. Here he has a beguilingly informal way of setting the little swipes of yellow and orange into a dense, silvery matrix. I like the ambience in some works from 1947, before the drip technique becomes an end in itself. In *Cathedral* I see a mind musing over its own operations. The mood is a little melancholy, but there is also a cheerful undercurrent to the melancholy, a pleasure in making all these distinctions that are so fine that they are just barely there.

Cathedral is one of the paintings that Clement Greenberg singled out in the years when he was writing short, pithy reviews of current exhibitions for *The Nation*. This is the canvas which he described as "a matter of much white, less black, and some aluminum paint," and said "reminds one of Picasso's and Braque's masterpieces of the 1912–15 phase of cubism. There is something of the same encasement in a style that, so to speak, feels for the painter and releases him of the anguish and awkwardness of invention, leaving his gift free to function almost automatically." I think Greenberg is taking matters rather too far. Pollock's incidents do not have anything like the inevitability of the great moments in the Analytical Cubist paintings. And yet Greenberg's description is compelling, as the kind of quietly hyperbolic writing that an excellent journalistic critic will do when he is reaching for a metaphor to describe the visceral excitement of seeing new work.

The fascination of some of these descriptions that Greenberg wrote in the '40s is that they give us Pollock before he has been overtaken by hagiography. That would happen soon enough, surely by 1952, when Harold Rosenberg published "The American Action Painters," in which neither Pollock nor de Kooning is mentioned, but their kind of painting is described as the record of an existential drama. It is true that Greenberg, by mentioning Pollock's "anguish" in 1948, was already backing into the Stations of the Cross mentality. But Greenberg, at least in the '40s, keeps his rhetoric under control. He doesn't say that the Pollock is a masterpiece like the Picasso and Braque, only that it "reminds" him of them. I don't see anything in the Pollock show that I would rate a masterpiece, but I can see that

Now After Many Years

Now after many years of living I begin to see
that I rebelled only a little and I do observe
all the laws and the commandments.
I observe the law of gravity, which is the law of the earth's attraction,
with all my body and with all my might and with all my love,
I observe the law of equilibrium and the law of the conservation
of matter: my body vs. my body, my soul vs. my soul,
my body vs. my soul.
I abhor a vacuum in my pain and in my joy
I follow the law of water seeking its own level, past and future are
cycled back to me. I rise and I raise with the law of the lever.
I begin to understand, as I would with an old car,
what makes it work, the action of pistons and brakes,
reward and punishment, be fruitful and multiply,
forget and remember, bolts and springs,
fast and slow and the laws of history.
Thus spake the years of my life unto the days of my life
Thus spake my soul unto the parts of my body
This is a sermon in the synagogue, this is a eulogy
for the dead, this is burial and this
is resurrection. Thus spake the man.

YEHUDA AMICHAI

—translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

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there are several paintings that could be argued to be masterpieces. As for the thought that Pollock's is one of the great careers, this is an idea that only became plausible after the Namuth photographs were published, Rosenberg had spoken, and painting had begun to be regarded as a kind of Dadaist activity. I cannot see that Pollock's achievement has any of the unfolding, multiplying complexities that we expect from an artist on the order of Braque or Mondrian.

Even before this show opened, we knew Pollock pretty well. Visitors to the retrospective may be struck by a few of Pollock's early, vividly expressionist works, or by there being a greater range of color and paint handling in the classic drip period than they had expected, or by the rather generous selection of works on paper. *Mural*, the nearly twenty-foot-long work painted for Peggy Guggenheim in 1943–44, which seldom leaves the University of Iowa Museum of Art, will be rated by some a revelation, what with all its crazily fast-dissolving rhythms. And the work of the last five years, including *Blue Poles* and the other late drip paintings, together with recapitulations of practically all the artist's earlier themes, looks fascinatingly eclectic or depressingly without direction, depending on how you approach it. But the truth is that this is a fairly brief career with no new regions to explore—nothing, for example, on the order of the Picasso sketchbooks, which were hardly known until the 1980s.

Varnedoe, along with Pepe Karmel (the Adjunct Assistant Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture who assisted in the organization of the show and wrote the second catalog essay), would say that an achievement of this retrospective has been to reveal new aspects of Pollock's working methods. The point is being made that very few of the Pollocks are pure drip paintings, and that even when what one sees at first all looks like flung paint, closer inspection often reveals that he worked back into the paintings with a brush in order to clarify certain elements. Karmel, in his essay, presents an elaborate analysis of the photographs and the films done by Namuth, so that we can begin to see how Pollock changed images over a period of time, whether there are buried figurative images (there are), and so forth. The conclusion of all of these meticulous studies is that Pollock was a meticulous worker, but I don't really see why this is a revelation to Pollock's admirers, who ought to take it for granted that an artist they rate this high is supremely subtle. As for the public at large, they may not much care how a painter goes about his job.

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The focus on Pollock's procedures may be presented in a spirit of disinterested scholarly investigation, but the larger effect is to shift attention from ends to means, and to align Pollock with a fashionable idea that what counts in art is not the product but the process. Of course, this shift was one that was already taking place in Pollock's mind. In the brief statement he wrote for the first and only issue of the artists' magazine *Possibilities*, published in the winter of 1947–48, the entire focus was on the working process, on his rejection of the easel in favor of "tack[ing] the unstretched canvas to the hard wall or the floor." "I feel nearer," Pollock wrote, "more a part of the painting, since this way I can walk around it, work from the four sides and literally be *in* the painting." This approach led directly to the huge flung-paint compositions of 1950, which envelop us in an arabesque of improvisatory moves, in an incantatory series of variations on a single theme. You could say that any painting is a record of a process, but for Pollock the subjectivity of the process was almost totally separated from the objectivity that most artists would think is involved in creating a record of that process, at least a record that will interest the world. These most extreme of all Pollock's paintings, with their near-infinity of traceries lashed so tightly together, dare gallerygoers to react, but there is nothing that says that the audience must accept the dare.

As late as 1955, in his essay "'American-Type' Painting," Greenberg was complaining that "though Pollock is a famous name now, his art has not been fundamentally accepted where one would expect it to be." Perhaps the fellow artists to whom Greenberg was referring were not wrong. Perhaps they felt that although Pollock had had an experience in the studio, he had not really made it available to the viewer. The experience of these canvases is in some way fundamentally static. I take Pollock at his word when he announces that he wants to stay *in* the painting (the italics are his). Pollock leaves us to regard the paintings any way we choose. I find it difficult to get into them at all. As for Kirk Varnedoe, he probably regards those 1950 works as panoramic snapshots of painting *in extremis*, and that leaves him with the exciting job of explaining how painting was marginalized—and why.

At the Modern, Pollock is The Last Painter. He's an off-the-wall-and-onto-the-floor guy who's behind everything from Robert Morris's scattered mixed-media pieces to Allan Kaprow's Happenings and Robert Smithson's Earthworks. No matter that Pollock meant to put the painting back on the wall. In the exuberant high spirits of the homecoming celebration, the grand old guys are whomever you want them to be, and Varnedoe's Pollock turns out to have far less to do with the painter's close friend Greenberg than with Kaprow, who in his essay in 1958 on "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock" wrote that "we saw in his example the possibility of . . . a sort of ecstatic blindness." Blind painters? Well, come to think of it, there are a lot of them, some very famous.

What all Pollock's admirers have agreed about, from Greenberg to Kaprow, is that this man had an unruly vitality that was his alone. That vitality, which fed both the painter's manic energy and the drunk's ugly personality, is of course a Class of '48 legend. When Philip Rahv, writing in the late '40s, divided American culture into Palefaces and Redskins, he was focusing on literature, but a visual-arts analogy was not hard to imagine; and if Walt Whitman is the top literary Redskin, Jackson Pollock is the top Redskin painter. Here was an artist who embraced experience feverishly, heedlessly (and he had actually described himself, in *Possibilities*, as working in a way that was "akin to the method of the Indian sand painters of the West"). Rahv's essay describes a face-off in American culture between Redskins and Palefaces, "a dichotomy between experience and consciousness—a dissociation between energy and sensibility, between conduct and theories of conduct, between life conceived as an opportunity and life conceived as a discipline." A good example of a Paleface painter of the 1940s would be the idiosyncratic realist Edwin Dickinson, who was at the time working on his elaborate architectural fantasy *Ruin at Daphne*, perfecting a delicately angled view of nature and culture.

The point of Rahv's essay was not to come down on the side of the Paleface or the Redskin, but rather to point out that there were virtues and dangers in both personalities. What Rahv found especially troubling in America was an inability to merge these attitudes, to combine "refinement" with a "bold confrontation of reality," as some Europeans seemed able to do. There is no point in clamping Rahv's thesis too tightly onto the visual arts; his Redskins were naturalists in the line of Dreiser and Sinclair Lewis, whereas the Redskin artists were mostly abstractionists. Still, there can be little doubt that at the best periods in American art Redskin energy and Paleface sensibility have begun to merge, and there was a time when the Abstract Expressionists were going that way. What the Pollock of '47, the Rothko of '48, and the de Kooning of '49 gave to New York was not so much works of violent immediacy as works with an internal complexity, a feeling for particularities that could suggest a new kind of fullness.

You see that fascinating yet fleeting period in the Rothko retrospective, where between 1948 and 1949 the artist brings a playfully critical intelligence to his dramatic instincts, and you are glad that you cannot tell where dramatic instinct ends and critical intelligence

And In Those Days

And in those days before we made a home for ourselves
we made the whole country into homes.
Even the beach at Caesarea
where we piled our clothes onto a solemn mound,
sandals and shirts and towels and pants yours and mine.
All jumbled together, like us, and we went into the water.
I said to myself: If we'd lived in ancient times and loved
in the mountains or the desert, we'd have piled stone on stone
and called upon the name of the Lord and gone on our way,
but we loved by the sea and our clothes
became a mound of witness in the sand
and we called upon the name of our love.
Passers-by thought we might have drowned in the sea.
But we didn't drown in the sea, we drowned in all the years
that came after that chapter and we remained wrapped up
in each other, like our clothes on that mound on the beach.

YEHUDA AMICHAI

—translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

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begins. For that couple of years, everything in Rothko's paintings is beguilingly alive. He is just discovering those gently edged rectangles, and his color, which had been muted and grayed-down through most of the '40s, surges forward with deep, vibrating purples and strangely sweet-and-sour greens. Each decision feels excitingly lucid. Rothko brings a Paleface's feeling for relationships to this ultra-personal imagery. We feel the interesting mix of bluntness and equivocation, we feel his surprise and his delight. The work has a budding, blossoming excitement.

And then, with startling speed, the moment has passed. Rothko's discoveries turn into inevitabilities. His forms are no longer the intricate language through which he expresses himself. Now those rectangles are just oracular pronouncements. Something that Rahv says about the Redskin writers is worth quoting here: "The Redskin writer is always on his own; and since his personality resists growth and change, he must continually repeat himself."

What a marvelous occasion this Class of '48 reunion would be for a homecoming match between the Redskins and the Palefaces. But of course the Redskins, champions in the eyes of the world, would not agree. And who are the Palefaces? At the beginning of the '50s, they were artists such as Fairfield Porter, Ellsworth Kelly, and Joan Mitchell, who knew how to harness Redskin energy to a less insistently personal, perhaps more wide-ranging kind of sensibility. Porter, Kelly, and Mitchell are by no means unknown artists, but theirs are also not the vantage points from which most people would now be inclined to regard the Class of '48.

In the late '50s, the young critic Irving Sandler wrote that "Joan Mitchell considers herself a 'conservative' in that her pictures are in the tradition of de Kooning, Kline, etc.," but the very idea that the Class of '48 could offer a painter a tradition was itself a Paleface view, sure to be rejected as being, to quote Rahv on the very worst characteristics of the Palefaces, "genteel, snobbish, and pedantic." Redskins such as Allan Kaprow and Robert Rauschenberg are the ones who have shaped the way that Pollock is now understood at the Museum of Modern Art. When the Class of '48 is presented in our museums, they are post-Dada and proto-Minimal. And we get almost no sense of how 1948 led to the painterly experiments of the '50s, a decade when artists were feverish about tradition and hard-nosed about confronting their own incipient academicism, a decade when they laid the groundwork for much of what is valuable (and all too often unsung) in the past half-century of American art.

Kirk Varnedoe may have some museumgoers believing that Pollock put painting out of bounds. I think it is probably closer to the truth to say that Pollock and the other Abstract Expressionists proved that painting itself was boundless. Far from closing any doors to the past, they suggested that more and more doors could be opened. One of those doors opened onto Impressionism. If you have Pollock in mind as you walk through the last rooms of "Monet in the 20th Century," the beautiful show at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts until the end of December, you can see how the easing-up of painting in the mid-'40s illuminated Monet's late *Water Lily* decorations, in which nature had already become a kind of abstraction. The majority of these *Water Lily* decorations were still in Monet's studio at his death in 1926. The artist evidently regarded some of these paintings as unfinished and perhaps unfinishable. Many were not exhibited until the 1950s; two are first being seen in public in this show. Pollock could prepare a person for these Monets. But the Monets—with their shimmering fire-to-ice colors, their multiplicity of unexpected details, and their hide-and-seek of surface and

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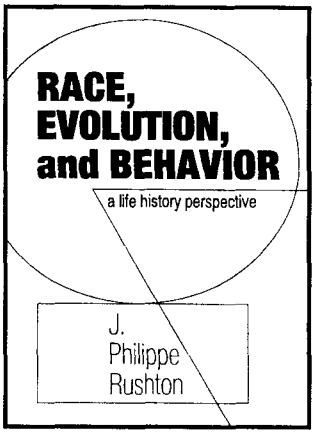

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depth, opacity and transparency—could also suggest a devastating criticism of Pollock's elegant sameness.

In the catalog of the Monet show, there is an essay by Michael Leja that deals with Monet's impact during the '50s. While Leja's insistently political analysis leaves him pretty much unable to deal with all the painterly realism that emerged out of the Monet revival (he must dismiss it as conservative), I was glad to see that he included a reproduction of a painting by Nell Blaine, an artist who died in 1996 at the age of seventy-four and has a lot more to tell us about the relevance of the Class of '48 than either Allan Kaprow or Robert Smithson. Blaine, too, is part of the homecoming celebrations this fall: the Tibor de Nagy Gallery has a show covering her last twenty years up until the end of December, timed to celebrate the publication of an excellent monograph by Martica Sawin (Hudson Hills). Blaine was young in the '30s, felt the impact of Mondrian and constructivism, and studied with Hans Hofmann; and in the midst of the opening-up of the Class of '48, she turned to a buoyant naturalism and became one of this country's finest painterly realists.

Reproduced in the new book on Blaine is a watercolor from her last New York show, *Night Lights, Snow* (1994), of Riverside Drive seen before dawn, when there is some color in the sky but the street lights are still glowing. This wonderfully open-hearted composition, full of acerbic color and lyric daring, tops any de Kooning after 1960 or Rothko after 1950, but Blaine's immersion in a kind of painterly representation that goes back to Derain and Corot is fatal in New York. She is too much the Paleface to make the grade. And yet if the story of the Class of '48 is ever going to be honestly told, it will have to include people such as Nell Blaine, a legendary bohemian in the '40s who actually ran with some of the same hell-bent crowd as Pollock. Fat chance. Blaine's life, like Blaine's art, will most likely be permanently marginalized in an art world where Pollock begets Warhol and who knows what else.

At the Museum of Fine Arts there is a coda to the Monet show, called "Reflections of Monet," which surveys the Impressionist's impact on Americans of the past half-century. Pollock and Rothko are included. Museumgoers encounter paintings by Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, and Morris Louis, artists whose big, lushly colored surfaces Greenberg believed offered a valuable response to Monet. This is more Redskin stuff; or maybe these artists should be called tacky Palefaces dressed up as tacky Redskins. But there is also a smattering of works by painters who saw the Monet revival as inspiring an intricately inflected kind of picture, whether it was a landscape by Fairfield Porter or an abstraction by Joan Snyder, who is one of the few artists working today who is actually engaging with the Abstract Expressionists in a way that enriches painting. If the Abstract Expressionists can be of any use to painters now, their achievements must be seen as more open, more delicate, more uncertain—and, finally, smaller—than the artists or most of their supporters have ever cared to imagine. A reckoning is what we need. But a fiftieth reunion bash is no time for that. People would just as soon go on confusing promise with fulfillment. Apparently they don't care if they end up denying both. All that really seems to matter to the curators at the Museum of Modern Art is that they can go on believing in the heroes of their youth. •

The Seeing I

By James Wood

Blindness
by José Saramago
translated by Giovanni Pontiero

(Harcourt Brace, 294 pp., $22)

In *If It Die*, his account of his childhood, André Gide writes of hearing that Mouton, a little friend from Luxembourg, was going blind. The young Gide went to his room and wept: "For several days I would keep my eyes shut for long periods and move around without opening them, attempting to feel what Mouton must have been feeling." This resonant suggestion might serve for us as a whisper to awaken not only *Blindness*, José Saramago's new novel, but his entire body of work. For within Gide's little crystal of anecdote, different meanings move: the boy with his eyes fiercely shut is trying to join in sympathetic concord with another human, and this could be an emblem not only of necessary human ethics, but also of the task of the novelist, who must concentrate artistically on the distribution of sympathy.

Yet if Gide links himself with Mouton, he also dissolves himself in the process. It is the paradox of all imaginative identification. And this paradox is intensified, in Gide's case, by the act of closing one's eyes, because in doing so we lose our visible relations with the rest of life. When we close our eyes—it is the little nightly crisis of sleep—we darkly falter, in the gloom of self-cancellation: perhaps we no longer exist? Being ourselves involves seeing ourselves; and yet seeing ourselves, curiously, is not about looking inward but about looking outward, at others. It is seeing others that makes us visible to ourselves, that reminds us that we exist. Although imaginative identification with others threatens to dissolve oneself, it also constitutes oneself.

The shadowiness of the self is Saramago's great theme, which he partly inherits from the poetry of Fernando Pessoa, his Portuguese predecessor, the Pessoa whom Saramago quotes at the beginning of his great novel *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, which appeared in 1984: "If they tell me that it is absurd to speak thus of someone who never existed, I should reply that I have no proof that Lisbon ever existed, or I who am writing, or any other thing wherever it might be." His new novel, which is an allegorical fantasy in which an entire people is struck by an epidemic of blindness, merely allegorizes what is already symbolic in the rest of Saramago's work.

In an unnamed country, citizens are suddenly afflicted by loss of sight. Quickly, society begins to break down: there is no electricity or running water, no food beyond that which can be scavenged, no law beyond the simple throbbing of need. We follow a small group of unfortunates, led by a doctor (an ophthalmologist, in the days when he had eyesight) and his wife, who has miraculously not lost her sight and appears to be the only sighted person in the land. In the streets, the blind crawl on all fours and defecate anywhere. It is not just the contingency of institutions that is exposed, but the contingency of verification: the blind "go around like ghosts, this must be what it means to be a ghost, being certain that life exists, because your four senses say so, and yet unable to see it."

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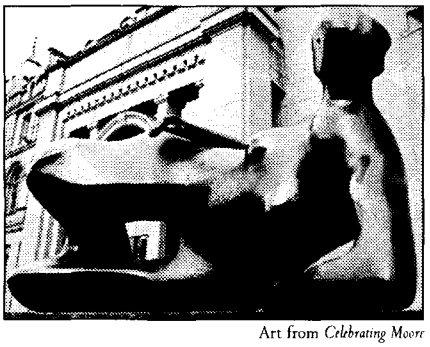

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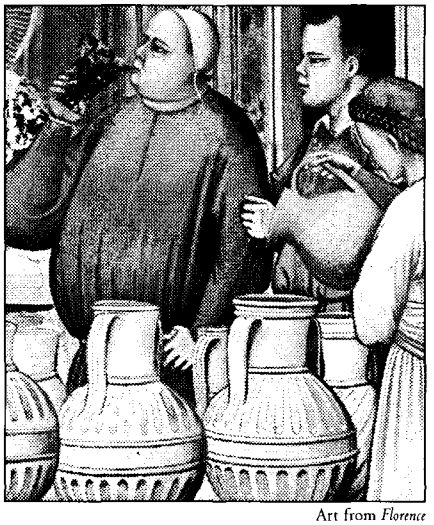

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primitive, or merely conceptual; but it lives in the spread of its particulars, and in the conviction of its allegory. The *Inferno* and *The Plague* are obvious models for this fall into hell. Reviewing Saramago's novel *Baltasar and Blimunda* in 1987, Irving Howe wrote that "I think I hear in his prose echoes of Enlightenment sensibility, caustic and shrewd." Yet Saramago, in his skepticism and in his healthy, delightfully literal approach toward the supernatural and the fantastic, more recalls the Greeks—both Greek tragedy and Greek satire.

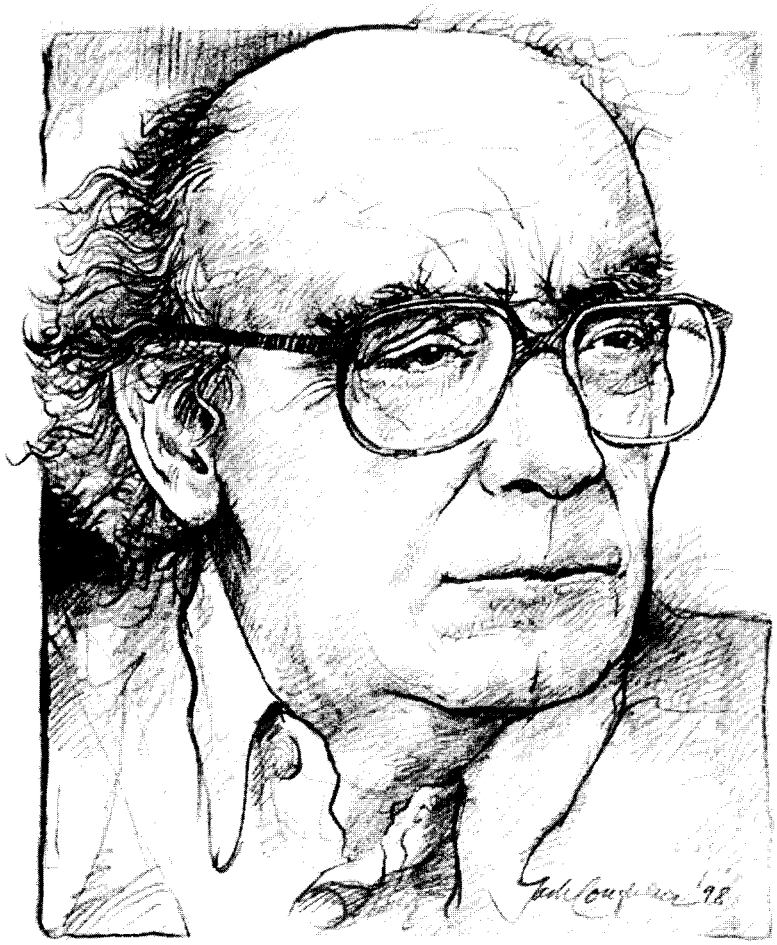
In Lucian's *Menippus*, for instance, the hero descends into Hades to find that death has undone all the fragile hierarchies of life: Philip of Macedon is stitching sandals to earn money, Xerxes is begging, and so on. But Lucian's lesson is made earlier, when Menippus tells us that on earth things have already become sadly inverted: "On observation I found people practicing the very opposite of what they preached. I saw those who advocated despising money clinging to it tooth and nail ... and those who would have us reject fame doing and saying everything for just that, and again pretty well all of them speaking out against pleasure, but in private clinging to it alone." In this light, Hades corrects the sad inversions of the world by reinverting them.

Thomas More, who translated Lucian from Greek into Latin, borrowed this idea for his beautifully literal and logical satire *Utopia*. The island of Utopia does not represent the ideal society so much as a comic one—it is the comic inversion of the uncomic inversion of rectitude that we practice in life. More did not intend us to live in Utopia, but to be logically mocked by it. (The Shakespearean Fool is a near-equivalent of this mode.) Saramago has said that "I cannot save anything but what I can do is write about what I think and feel and the anguish of seeing a world that could already have resolved a large portion of its humanitarian problems, but which not only has not solved any, but which, in fact, aggravates many of them.... The Romans used to say that man is the wolf of mankind. What would they say were they alive today?" Saramago is a Communist, even now, but he has something in common with the implicit communitarianism of Lucian and More.

And he has something in common, too, with the ancient idea of magical inversion. In his novel *The History of the Siege of Lisbon* (1989), a proofreader decides to insert the word "not" into a history of Portugal that he is checking. Suddenly, the history book asserts, against the evidence, that the crusaders did not help the Portuguese to conquer Lisbon in the twelfth century. This apparently tiny inversion causes havoc with Portugal's official sense of itself, and it allows Saramago to unwind an exquisitely sly satire on the contingency of national history.

Likewise, in his greatest book, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, which appeared in 1991, Saramago secularizes the Gospel narrative with the simplest inversions. In this book God is fallible, and Jesus is not the son of God but the son of Joseph. Thus every time Jesus uses the word "Father," a little spark of blasphemy is struck. When Jesus is told by God how much suffering and bloodshed will flow in history as a result of his crucifixion, he tries to abdicate his duty: "Father, take from me this cup." As he dies on the cross, he inverts Jesus's penultimate words, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and cries out "Men, forgive Him, for He knows not what he has done."

In *Blindness*, similarly, so great are the horrors witnessed by the doctor's sighted wife that the simple privilege of sight over blindness begins to seem the worst privilege, begins to seem its inversion. Sight "had exposed her to greater horror than she could ever have imagined, it had convinced her that she would rather be blind, nothing else." In the country of the suddenly blind, the one-eyed man is not, in fact, king. He is the slave of all the blind, and the most unhappy one of all, because he sees their degradation.



JOSÉ SARAMAGO BY JACK COUGHLIN FOR THE NEW REPUBLIC

Yet Saramago is most like the Greeks—and like their Renaissance heirs, such as Montaigne—in the manner in which he keeps in balance both skepticism and realism, or uncertainty and health. Indeed, he is a kind of Pyrrhonist in reverse, who wriggles through a skeptical tunnel only to emerge into a climate of truth, a climate slightly thinned and rarified of certainty, but still certainly extant. His work plays with, but ethically thickens, Pessoa's hallucinatory sense of reality. It might be said that Saramago is epistemologically skeptical (he uses his fiction to knock away at our foundations) but metaphysically faithful.

If Saramago is skeptical about foundations, it is because he is skeptical of these foundations, not all foundations. This paradox can be tasted in an apparently small technical triumph, from which, in fact, the deepest concerns of his fiction flow. This is his use of what Barthes called "the reference code," whereby a writer confidently refers to the general consensus by means of such locutions as "as is usual" or "as everyone knows" or "as people always do in such circumstances." Showing his roots in the *nouveau roman*, Barthes wanted to finger it as the spoiled child of nineteenth-century realism (such realism being the enemy of the *nouveau romanciers*). Yet this realism has

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always existed in imaginative writing. Tolstoy, when he used it with the greatest beauty and simplicity, was merely being Homeric. When Ivan Ilyich's colleagues hear of his death, Tolstoy writes that "the mere fact of the death of an intimate associate aroused, as is usual, in all who heard of it a complacent feeling that 'it is he who is dead, and not I.'"

Very few writers can ever reach Tolstoy's great median, and in our age most writers eschew the reference code, or flutter self-consciously around it. Its obsolescence has to do with a larger nervousness about omniscient narration, which is for some writers ideologically too much and for other writers formally too little. The reference code is the most obvious flower of the authorial omniscience. But Saramago, characteristically, uses the reference code both to affirm and to question.

Omniscient narration generally affirms how much we know, how much we have in common, but Saramago uses it to illuminate how little we know. This is partly because he narrates his novels as if he were someone both wise and ignorant. His novels are all told by someone who has Saramago's powers of narration, but who is not Saramago—the tone is skeptical, a little saucy, a little prejudiced (the narrator always has a firm view about women's proper role), even a little garrulous and foolish at times. The sentences loiter, without punctuation or paragraph breaks or quotation marks for speech. It is as if Saramago's books were tales told by a stubborn old Portuguese man sitting on a bench, endlessly smoking and flicking the ash of surly speculation all over his clothes. Occasionally he spits out a truth onto the ground, examines it curiously, and then rubs it sarcastically with his shoe.

Sometimes this narrator uses the reference code to affirm the most banal truths, thereby parodying the mode by exhausting it—but exhausting the mode of truth-telling, not the truth, which remains anciently immovable: "Everyone knows that men like to fight each other." More often, he does it by misdirecting the reference code, by pointing it at shared questions, or at the unanswerable, rather than at shared answers. And he uses his curious, unpunctuated nudging of syntax to do this. At the beginning of *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*, for instance, Ricardo Reis arrives at the harbor in Lisbon, on a boat from Brazil. A tone of strange mockery—but also, strange respect—is established when Ricardo hails a taxi, and is initially flummoxed by the taxi driver's question, "Where to?" Ricardo

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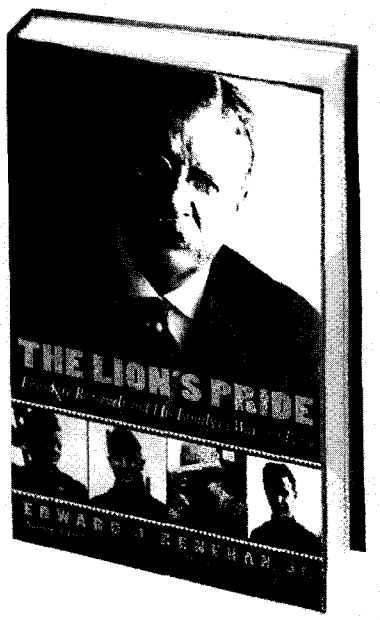

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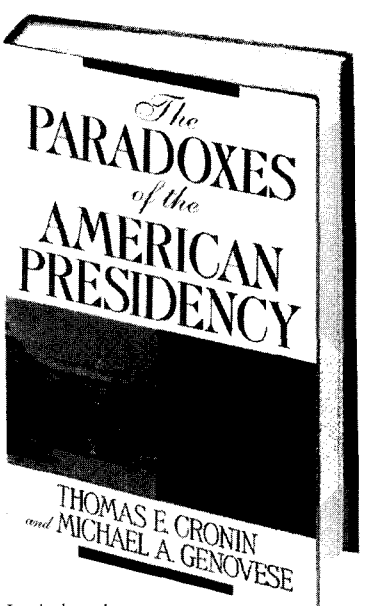

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has not really thought this far ahead; he does not even have a hotel in mind. Saramago's narrator speculates that Ricardo was befuddled "perhaps because he has been asked one of the two fatal questions, Where to. The other question, and much worse, is Why."

Similarly, in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ*, Saramago's narrator questions everything, but uses a tone of certainty—the reference code—in order to encourage uncertainty: "For in truth, there are things God Himself does not understand, even though He created them." In this book, the narrator is a sly old Portuguese peasant, who knows everything and nothing: "The rest of the journey to Jerusalem was not so easy. In the first place, there are Samaritans and there are Samaritans, which means that even in those days one swallow was not enough to make a summer...." Saramago uses the habits of certainty to pick away at the fabric of certainty; and yet the result is not the cheap vacuum of postmodernism's usual excavations, but a strangely refreshed respect for mystery. During Passover, crowds wander through Jerusalem, "exclaiming, Alleluia, Hosanna, Amen, or saying none of these things, feeling it was inappropriate to walk around shouting Hallelujah or Hip hip hurrah, because there is really not much difference between the two expressions, we use them enthusiastically until with the passage of time and by dint of repetition we finally ask ourselves, What does it mean, only to find no answer."

The Vatican complained about *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* (and complained again when Saramago won the Nobel Prize), but it is right that this novel is "testimony of a substantial anti-religious sentiment." Still, there is also a kind of healthy secularism of ignorance in evidence, which often blooms, in Saramago's work, into the enunciation of the old, simple, weary truths. And to announce them, Saramago is able to use a now-cleansed reference code, because he has torn it out of the domain of consensus, and let it go to work in the domain of discovery. He makes omniscient narration a process; and because narration is not settled for Saramago, his stories can speak truths without complacency. He earns the right of authority by dissolving it. Near the end of *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis*:

> They say time stops for no man, that time marches on, commonplaces that are still repeated, yet there are people who chafe at the slowness with which it passes. Twenty-four hours to make a day, and at the end of the day you discover that it was not worthwhile, and the following day is the same all over again, if only we could leap over all the futile weeks in order to live one hour of fulfillment, one moment of splendor, if splendor can last that long.

Saramago is both a literalist and a fantasist, as he is both a realist and a skeptic. All his phantasmagorias gain their strength from the straightforward, unsentimental literalism of their magical elements. In *Baltasar and Blimunda*, Saramago makes it seem the most natural idea in the world that these two eighteenth-century renegades would want to escape the Portuguese Inquisition and fly to heaven in a flying-machine. *Blindness* is written up like a medical report. Likewise, *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* is powerful, in part, because Saramago tells his blasphemous story while making the most simple and direct use of supernatural elements—Satan, an angel, a pillar of flame, walking on water, and so on. Indeed, it is by making these elements absolutely literal that Saramago holds them up to the light of reason, and peers through them.

In that book, Jesus is the natural son of Joseph, but is called upon by God to lay down his life for man. By tampering with the Gospel stories in a delicately subversive manner, Saramago creates his own dark parable. Early in the book, Joseph overhears two soldiers discussing King Herod's plan to murder all the newly born children in Bethlehem. He runs home, and flees Bethlehem with Mary and the infant Jesus. He saves his child, but he is haunted by the guilty idea that he could have warned the parents of Bethlehem about Herod's plan, and did not. He suffers terrible nightmares, in which he is one of the soldiers marching to kill his own son.

Joseph, writes Saramago, is condemned by God for his sin of omission, and his guilt will pass to Jesus. "God does not forgive the sins He makes us commit," is Saramago's bitter comment. Sure enough, Joseph is mistakenly arrested in Jerusalem by Roman soldiers who are rounding up Jewish rebels, and is crucified on a hill. He is thirty-three years old. When Jesus is older, he asks his mother about the nightmare that made his father cry out in his sleep, and she tells him about Herod's murder of the innocents. Jesus is horrified, and says: "Father murdered the children of Bethlehem." Jesus leaves home, and never really returns. He sees not Satan, but God in the wilderness. When he asks God why he must die, God replies that "you will be the spoon I dip into humanity and bring out filled with people who believe in the new god I intend to become."

Saramago's novel is an extraordinarily eloquent heretical text, filled with deep compassion for humanity's suffering. When Jesus asks God what the future will be like once Jesus has died, God falters, and then describes the establishment of the Church, the persecution of the martyrs, the bloodiness of the Crusades, the

Jerusalem Is A Merry-Go-Round

Jerusalem is a merry-go-round and round
from the Old City through all the neighborhoods and back to the Old.
And you can't get off. And whoever jumps off endangers his life
and whoever gets off at the final round has to pay again
to get back on for the rounds that have no end.
And instead of elephants and horses of many colors to ride upon
there are religions that go up and down and turn around on their axis
to the music of oily tunes from the houses of prayer.
Jerusalem is a see-saw: sometimes I go down
into the past generations, and sometimes I go up to the skies, and then
I scream like a child, feet swinging in the heights:
I want down, Daddy, I want down,
Daddy, get me down.
And that's how all the saints ascend to heaven,
like a child screaming, Daddy, I want to stay up here,
Daddy, don't get me down, Our Father Our King,
leave us up here, Our Father Our King!

YEHUDA AMICHAI

—translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

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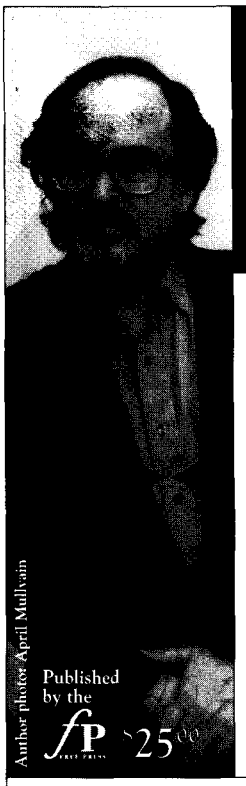
horrors of the Inquisition, the abrasions of schism, the barbs of fundamentalism, the cruelties of exclusion. Jesus asks God to spare him from his sentence, and thus prevent the unfolding of this terrible future, but God refuses. Jesus cannot be spared, because he has been condemned. Saramago's novel flows with a relentlessly inverting logic from one simple Gnostic premise: that God is either wicked, false, or fallible.

The story winds outward from Herod's massacre of the children. God, the supposed Father, did not save the little children. Joseph, Jesus's father, did not save them either. God condemns Joseph to death for this sin, and the sins of the fathers pass to Jesus, who is crucified like his father. Thus, in Saramago's reading, Jesus went to the cross not as our savior but as one of us, condemned by a form of Original Sin. We are Jesus's inheritors, condemned like him to crucify each other, generation after generation. We are the victims of an original sin, and our sentence is to be human. But "Father murdered the children of Bethlehem," says Jesus, and Saramago, of course, intends us to note the irony. It was God, the original Father, who killed the children, and therefore God must have condemned himself, and therefore God is not only the inventor of original sin, but its first practitioner, and thus its first victim. The sins of the fathers are in fact the sins of the Father's. God is condemned by the evil that He Himself allows. As Satan cannily tells Jesus, "your God is the only warden of a prison where the only prisoner is your God."

Saramago adds almost nothing to the Gospel story. What he does, rather like Milton but more emphatically, is activate the ancient heretical cruxes, above all the familiar one that a God who originates evil must Himself be evil. In addition, he turns on its head the New Testament idea of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, slaughtered to cleanse humans of their sin. No, says Saramago, Jesus was slaughtered for his Father's sins, both Joseph's and God's. Here Saramago is the splendid heir, in force and in idea, of Nietzsche in *The Anti-Christ*, who rails against the "paganism" of Jesus's "sacrifice." And Saramago makes resonant the implicit blasphemy at the heart of the incarnation. For if Jesus was truly human, then he inherited Adam's sin; but if he was also truly divine, then the sin he inherited was not Adam's but God's—not his father's, but his Father's.

At one point in the novel, Jesus speaks with God, who appears as a pillar of smoke, and Saramago writes that "it grieved him to be sent away in this



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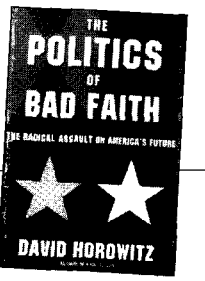

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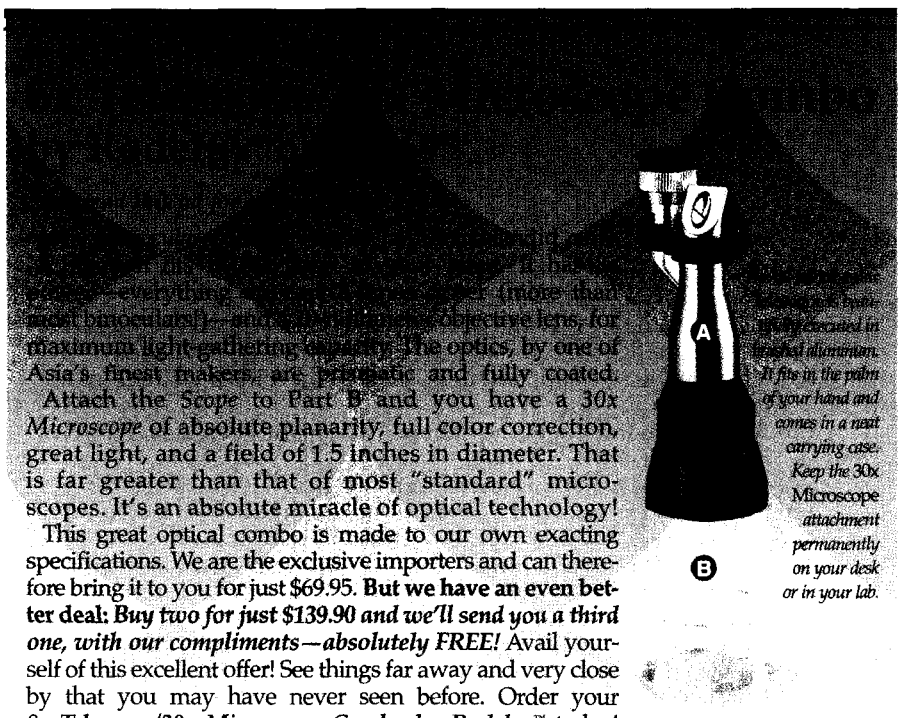

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manner, after having met God, for to the best of his knowledge there was not a single man in all Israel who could boast of having seen God and lived." Saramago's narrator continues:

> It is true that Jesus did not exactly see Him, but if a cloud appears in the desert in the form of a pillar of smoke and says, I am the Lord, and then holds a conversation that is not only logical and sensible but so compelling that it can only be divine, then to have even the slightest doubt is unpardonable.

This is characteristic of the tone of all of Saramago's fiction, and it is what makes him so attractive and sinuous a writer. His narrators always hover somewhere between belief and doubt, giving with one hand and taking with the other.

Saramago, who is an atheist, is wittily casting doubt on the idea of God's appearing—by asserting that he believes that God appeared! Or rather, he believes that a cloud appeared and said, "I am the Lord." There is a way in which Saramago uses literalism to affirm *and* to subvert. The passage above might, after all, be a theory of fiction. If a cloud appears in a novel and says "I am the Lord," and if the spectacle is done with enough reality, then it would be wrong to doubt it. Likewise for Jesus in the desert. All of Saramago's fiction is full of magical occurrences which are described in the most touchingly literal fashion, as if they were merely one of the ordinary working days in realism's week. Yet, equally, all literalism tends toward skepticism, because it makes us scrutinize literal appearances. Can a pillar of cloud exist? Can God exist as a pillar of cloud? *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* is so powerful because Saramago's fictional skepticism spills so naturally into a deeper skepticism about belief.

Thus a theory of fiction becomes, in effect, an anti-theology. Saramago suggests that we can only be literal about belief (the cloud appeared; it was God), but that as soon as we are literal about belief we infect it with the virus of parody, because we see it, precisely, as belief and nothing more. This tidal movement reaches a particular black force in *The Gospel According to Jesus Christ* and in *Blindness*, and a particular skittering, intermittent beauty in *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* (which is Saramago's own favorite among his novels).

Ricardo Reis, a doctor from Brazil, is an aloof, conservative aesthete who has decided to return to his native Portugal. It is the end of 1935, and the great poet Fernando Pessoa has just died. Reis is himself a poet and mourns Pessoa's departure. He is not sure what to do. He has saved some money, and for a while he lives in a hotel, where he has an affair with a chambermaid. He writes several beautiful lyrics, and is visited by the now-ghostly Pessoa, with whom he converses. As usual, Saramago describes these conversations in a frankly literal and direct manner, quite without the satiny shimmer that we have come to expect from certain American practitioners of magical realism.

Reis wanders the streets of Lisbon, as 1935 curdles into 1936. He reads the newspapers, and is increasingly alarmed by the baying of Europe's dogs: in Spain civil war and the rise of Franco, in Germany Hitler, in Italy Mussolini, and in Portugal the fascist dictatorship of Salazar. He would like to retreat from this bad news. He reflects fondly on the story of the 97-year-old John D. Rockefeller, who has a specially doctored version of *The New York Times* delivered every day, altered to contain only good news. "The world's threats are universal, like the sun, but Ricardo Reis takes shelter under his own shadow."

But Ricardo Reis is not a "real" fictional character, whatever that means. He is one of the four names which the actual Pessoa—the poet who worked and lived in Lisbon and died in 1935—assumed, and in whose persona he wrote poetry. The special flicker of this book, the tint and the delicacy that make it seem hallucinatory, derive from the solidity with which Saramago invests a character who is a fictional character twice over: first Pessoa's, then Saramago's. This enables Saramago to tease us with something that we already know, namely that Ricardo Reis is fictional. Saramago makes something deep and moving of this because Ricardo also feels himself to be somewhat fictional, at best a shadowy spectator, a man on the margins of things. And when Ricardo reflects thus, we feel a strange tenderness for him, aware of something that he does not know, that he is not real.

Is there a way in which all of us are fictional characters, parented by life and written by ourselves? This is something like Saramago's question; but it is worth noting that he reaches his question by travelling in the opposite direction of those postmodernist novelists who like to remind us of the fictionality of all things. A writer such as William Gass is always lecturing us: "Remember, this character is just a character. I invented him." By starting with an invented character, however, Saramago is able to pass through the same skepticism, but in the opposite direction, toward reality, toward the deepest questions. Saramago asks, in effect: But what

Balaam Balaam

Balaam Balaam, whose curse turned to blessing and his blessing
to love.
Didn't sleep all night, and at dawn he dashed off to the hills
to survey the tribes of Israel and deliver his oracle.
But the children of Israel had already left in haste during the night,
light on their feet, free from blessing and curse, so all Balaam saw
was the abandoned camp, tent-pegs, tail-ends of rope and campfire
embers
and the smell of herds and the memory of women's perfume and veils
left behind,
a dress ripped by harsh thistles, broken clay jars,
a bright-colored ribbon and a jackal scratching in the garbage, howling.
And Balaam went home, as a man returns to his lover's room
on the morning after and finds the room empty, only a crumpled letter,
a white stocking, a comb with hair in it—that's how Balaam longed for
the children of Israel. Balaam and his Oration, Man without a Nation,
whose curse turned to blessing and his blessing to love
and his love to longing and his longing to a pain that has no end.
From his window he could still see the pillar of fire
and the pillar of smoke on the horizon,
and never the twain shall meet.

YEHUDA AMICHAI

—translated by Chana Bloch and Chana Kronfeld

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is just a character? And Saramago's uncertainty is more real than Gass's skepticism, for no one ever says "I don't exist." We say, rather, "I believe I exist," exactly as Ricardo does.

In Saramago's novels, the self may cast only a shadow, like Ricardo Reis, but this shadow implies not the nonexistence of the self, but only its difficult visibility, its near-invisibility, rather as the shadow cast by the sun warns us that we cannot look directly at it. The self is blindingly real in Saramago's work. This is touched on, with lovely tugging indirections, in both *The Year of the Death of Ricardo Reis* and *Blindness*. Ricardo Reis is aloof, ghostly. He does not want to get pulled into real relationships, including the real relationships of politics. Europe is scrambling for war, but Ricardo luxuriously sits around wondering if he exists. He writes a poem that begins "We count for nothing, we are less than futile." Another poem begins: "Walk empty-handed, for wise is the man who contents himself with the spectacle of the world."

Yet the novel suggests that perhaps there is something culpable about being content with the spectacle of the world if the world's spectacle is horrifying. Near the end of the book, Ricardo reads in the newspaper that some Hitler Youth students from Hamburg were guests of honor at a Teacher Training College in Lisbon, and that they wrote in the guest book: "We are nobody." Saramago comments: "This meant, as the clerk on duty hastened to explain, that the people are indeed nobody if not guided by the elite, the cream, the flower, the chosen few of our society." To be a "nobody" may be to surrender oneself to dictatorship. And the reader is suddenly jerked back two hundred pages, to Ricardo's poem, that began "We count for nothing, we are less than futile." Ricardo's ghostliness of relations may have a fascist element, and Saramago intends us to reflect on the fascism implicit in modernism's spectatorial shadowiness. The question of this book, and by extension of all Saramago's work, is not the trivial fictional game-playing of "Does Ricardo Reis exist?" It is the much more poignant question, "Do we exist if we refuse to relate to anyone?" If we read only a special version of *The New York Times*, like John D. Rockefeller, are we alive? Only by relation do we constitute ourselves.

Blindness is an anguished essay on the necessity of relations. In despair, the doctor's sighted wife cries out that without anyone to see her, her eyesight is useless: "I shall become more and more blind because I shall have no one to see

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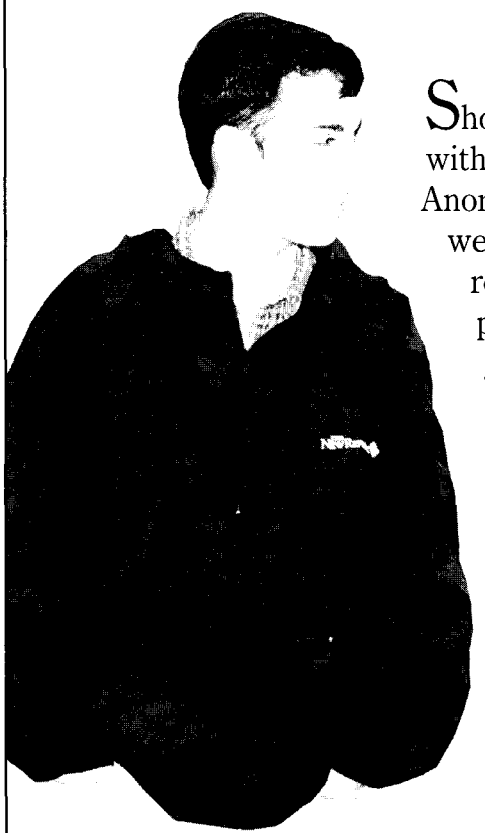

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me." Her eyesight is constituted by everyone else's eyesight. Earlier in the novel, she laments: "Dear God, how we miss having our sight, to be able to see, to see, even if they were only faint shadows, to stand before the mirror, see a dark diffused patch and be able to say, That's my face, anything that has light does not belong to me." We may be only a shadow on the mirror, but this is everything; and if it is everything, Saramago's work seems to suggest, then we must not take shelter under our own shadow, as Ricardo Reis does. We must attend to all the other shadows that brush the earth. I may not know if I exist, but I know if other people exist. And if other people exist, then I exist. It is a kind of primary deduction. We are all like little André Gide, confirming ourselves by closing our eyes and thinking of each other. •

The Virtuoso

BY ADAM KIRSCH

Hay
by Paul Muldoon

(Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 131 pp., $22)

"Virtuoso" is a loaded compliment, an honorific that conceals a reproach. It implies performance, as distinct from creation: a performer stands before his audience and impresses them, while a creator must enter into his audience and engage them. In music, the two roles are usually separate, and so there is a natural place for the virtuoso, with his showmanship and his displays of technical control. In poetry, however, it is much less clear that one should aspire to the "virtuosic." In poetry, the performance *is* the creation. The skill that the poet displays in writing his poem remains in the poem itself, and it is one of the elements that attracts us to it. Hopkins's technical daring, or Horace's vaunting pride, is a part of what makes their poetry appealing. But if virtuosity is all that a poet can display, if his poems demand attention simply because of their elaborateness and difficulty, then he has in some sense failed. For we only want to see such a performance once, and poems demand to be read again and again. In this sense, the "virtuoso poet" is a contradiction in terms.

On the dustjacket of *Hay*, Paul Muldoon's eighth book of poems, a critic lauds him as a "prodigy" who has "gone on to become a virtuoso." It is characteristic of Muldoon, though, that in the book itself we find the following haiku:

> A horse farts and farts
> on the wind-tormented scarp.
> A virtuoso.

Clearly this is a poet aware of the risk of the label, and he goes out of his way to mock it. And elsewhere in the volume we find Muldoon making larger and more substantive claims for his own poetry. In "Anonymous: Myself and Pangur," a poem in which the poet compares his own activity to the activity of his cat, he writes: "I, sharp-witted, swift, and sure,/shed light on what had seemed obscure." The defensive "anonymous" of the title, and the light-hearted premise of the poem, are meant to distance Muldoon from this praise of his own work, to make it seem like a joke; but the message, that what seems merely difficult in his poetry is actually meant to convey a deeper truth, is heartfelt. Muldoon does not want to be seen simply as a clever, witty performer.

Yet he cannot escape that verdict so easily. It is true that Muldoon sometimes writes directly, with plain emotion, even sentimentally. But those are not his most characteristic poems, nor his best. When he is at his most original, Muldoon is rather a kind of acrobat, piling up strange rhymes, references, and conceits in a way that is disorienting and exhilarating. In *Hay*, we find a sort of double sestina with twelve end-words; a poem in which every line ends with the word "hand"; two picture-poems; a sequence of poems based on classic rock-and-roll albums; and a verse-diary made up of ninety haiku. Clearly Muldoon does not choose these forms because they allow the most natural expression for some urgent idea, or because they are inherently musical. The element of the dare—can he meet the challenge that he has set himself?—is always present, and often predominant.

Muldoon's interest in unlikeliness—in forms and metaphors that risk being seen as pursuing oddity for its own sake—allies him with the Metaphysical tradition in English poetry; and frequently he uses techniques that can be traced back directly to Donne. Like Donne, he will juxtapose dissimilar images in order to tease out some relationship between them: the classic poetic "conceit." To emphasize their constancy, Donne compares himself and his lover to the legs of a compass:

> And though it in the center sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam,
> It leans, and harkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.
>
> Such wilt thou be to me, who must
> Like the other foot, obliquely run;
> Thy firmness makes my circle just,
> And makes me end, where I begun.

In his new book, Muldoon writes on the same theme, using as his metaphor Siamese twins:

> We were joined at the hip. We were joined
> at the hip
> like some latter-day Chang and Eng,
> though I lay in that dreadful kip
> in North Carolina while you preferred
> to hang
>
> loose in London....

Here, as often, Muldoon's conceits are consciously humorous, amused at their own improbability. In *Hay*, for instance, we find this description of an old pair of boots:

> a pair of my da's boots so worn
> it was hard to judge where the boots came
> to an end
> and the world began....

And this, on the taste of raspberries:

> Raspberries. Red-blue.
> A paper cut on the tongue
> from a billet-doux.

And the poem "The Little Black Book" is a catalog of conceited metaphors for sex: "I fluttered, like an erratum slip, between her legs"; "I practiced my double back flip between her legs." From here, it is only a short distance to the lowest form of conceit, the pun, where the strangeness lies not in the images or ideas but in the words themselves: "metaphysicattle," "whited sepulchritude," and, attributed to Joseph Brodsky, "there's an Auden in every Adenauer."

At its best, however, Muldoon's use of the conceit can move beyond joking, producing something genuinely new and strange. This is what happens in "Good Friday, 1971. Driving

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Westward," from Muldoon's first book, *New Weather* (1973). The title of the poem pays homage to Donne's "Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward." Apparently entirely secular, it tells of the poet taking a drive with a girl to the west of Ireland, in the course of which their car hits something in the road. The collision is a minor episode: "I had seen nothing, perhaps a stick/Lying across the road. I glanced back once/And there was nothing but a heap of stones." Only in the last stanza, when the couple stops in a village for lunch, does the memory of Good Friday intrude, shockingly, into the poem:

> She stood up there and then, face full
> of drink,
> And announced that she and I were
> to blame
> For something killed along the way
> we came.
> Children were warned that it was rude
> to stare,
> Left with their parents for a breath of air.

Without any overt statement, the death of an animal on the road has been turned into the death of Christ: the "something killed" for which we are all "to blame." And the reaction of the scandalized parents reminds us forcibly of the real scandal of Christianity, the mystery of guilt and expiation which they would prefer to keep hidden away from the children. The poem's Metaphysical quality lies in the sudden transformation of an incident into a metaphor, so deftly and unexpectedly that we are really surprised by it.

The conceit, then, is one species of Muldoon's daring; but it is a comparatively familiar one, with a literary pedigree, easy to recognize and assimilate. What makes Muldoon's poems truly distinctive is a much more total kind of strangeness, in which not just the images but the plot, diction, references, and formal scheme are so complex as to border on incomprehensibility. Yet Muldoon's strangeness is not a purely Dadaist or Surrealist strangeness, of the sort we expect from John Ashbery, in which the poem acts as a record of the poet's free associations. Ashbery's strangeness is casual, while Muldoon's makes a point of being formal, though he bends his forms to the breaking point. It is the play between his self-imposed constraints and his eclectic language and references that gives his poems their element of spectacle, of show—of virtuosity.

Consider the sequence that concludes *Hay*, "The Bangle (Slight Return)." The title refers us back to an earlier poem in the volume, called "The Bangle"; but the later poem has no apparent relationship to it. Instead it seems to describe the poet having dinner with a woman in a Paris restaurant. Yet this narrative is only one part of a collage, which also includes Virgil narrating the Fall of Troy, a sea voyage, and the poet's father emigrating to Australia in search of work. The first sonnet, of thirty in the sequence, is as follows:

> "The beauty of it," ventured Publius
> Vergilius Maro,
> "is that your father and the other
> skinnymalinks
> may yet end up a pair of jackaroos
> in the canefields north of Brisbane."
> We heard the tink
>
> of blade on bone, the Greeks' alalaes
> as they slashed and burned, saw Aeneas
> daddle-dade
> his father, Anchises, and his son, Iulus,
> to a hidey-hole on the slopes of Mount Ida.
>
> "The beauty of it is that I delivered them
> from harm;
> it was I who had Aeneas steal
> back to look for Creusa, I who had her
> spirit rub
> like a flame through his flame-burnished
> arms,
> I who might have let him find his own way
> through the steel
> of smoke, among the cheerless dead,
> the dying's chirrups."

At first, the passage seems like nonsense, a miscellany of allusions and registers. But amid the seeming randomness we notice the rhyme scheme, which Muldoon insists on even as he takes great liberties with his rhymes. If we allow that "alalaes" rhymes with "Iulus," and "Maro" with "jackaroos," we can see that this is an orthodox sonnet, with an octave and sestet. Traditionally, a poet might use a sonnet to gain regularity, sonority, compactness; but for Muldoon the form seems to be present only so that we will notice that he is writing a sonnet. Again, the suspicion of virtuosity comes to the forefront. Muldoon uses the rhyme scheme as a tightrope. The point is not to get safely across it, but to come as close as possible to falling off.

The poem becomes clearer if we realize that, in this sequence, meaning is treated just like the sonnet form; it is not there primarily for its own sake, but to be manipulated as cleverly and unexpectedly as possible. In this first sonnet, Muldoon puts several balls in the air: Virgil, Muldoon's father, the woman Creusa, and an assertion of the poet's mastery over his creations. Already there are some connections among these themes. The poet's father is evidently going from Ireland to Australia, where

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he may come to harm; and this chimes with the mention of Anchises, Aeneas's father, whom his son rescues from the destruction of Troy. To follow this analogy, it would be up to Muldoon to save his own father from ending up a "jackaroo" in Brisbane. And, indeed, he can do this—because in this poem the father is a fictional character, and Virgil has told us that the poet has power over his characters ("I delivered them from harm"). Thus Muldoon is both Aeneas and Virgil, the rescuer of his father and his father's creator.

This is a contorted reading of the passage, but its contortion does not lessen its validity. Quite the contrary. Muldoon forces us to read with a heightened attention in order to keep track of his meanings, in exactly the same way that we must be alert to pick up his rhyme scheme. And as this sequence proceeds, the difficulty becomes greater and greater: the "Creusa" of Virgil's poem merges into Muldoon's own dinner companion; the boat on which his father is sailing to Australia is identified with Marvell's line, "as one put drunk into the packet-boat"; the language swerves from Muldoon's English to the waiter's French. The poem proceeds by a kind of controlled chaos, teasing the reader with its sudden shifts of scene and plot.

Only in the penultimate sonnet does Muldoon offer some kind of resolution, some key to the poem, in Virgil's address to the poet:

> The beauty of it is that your da and that
> other phantasm
> no more set foot in Queensland
>
> than the cat that got the cream
> might look at a king. That's the sheer
> beauty of it.
> Ne'er cast a clout, heigh, in midstream.
> No brilliant. No brilliantine, ho. No
> classifieds
>
> in *The Tyrone Courier.*
> No billabong. No billy-boil.
> No stately at the autoharp....

In this list, elements from earlier in the sequence are recovered (*The Tyrone Courier*, for example, is a newspaper that the poet's father is said at one point to be reading) and negated one by one; they have all been the poet's invention. And so the challenge of the first sonnet—how is Muldoon to rescue his father as Aeneas did Anchises?—is answered. He saves his father by recalling him from the dangers into which Muldoon's own poem had thrust him. The poem has circled back on itself, as we are reminded by the phrase "the beauty of it," which we first saw in the opening line of the sequence. What seemed completely aleatory (or, as Muldoon has it, "al-al-al-al-aleatory," echoing the Greeks' war-cry of "alalae") has in fact been following a premeditated course.

This fact acquits "The Bangle (Slight Return)" of the charge of randomness, but it does not dispel the suspicion of idleness. In one sense, it is unfair to call Muldoon's puzzle-making gratuitous; all poetry is gratuitous, in that it did not have to be written. Any poem that employs a strict form is, moreover, a type of puzzle: the poet sets himself an obstacle in order to make the poem seem more accomplished, more of a feat. Still, Muldoon's best poems—there is usually one long show-piece in each collection, from "Immram" in *Why Brownlee Left* (1980) through "7, Middagh Street" in *Meeting the British* (1986) to the 150-page "Yarrow" in *The Annals of Chile* (1994)—incline very heavily to difficulty for its own sake. In these poems, subject and theme are far less important than treatment and style.

In *Hay*, the poem "Errata" consists entirely of imagined corrections to some unspecified text, and one of them is "for 'ludic' read 'lucid'": Muldoon implies that his playfulness is a higher form of clarity. It is possible, of course, that there is a master-design behind each of Muldoon's puzzles, which may reveal itself after repeated close readings. In this, as in its linguistic inventiveness and splintering of narrative, Muldoon's poetry is reminiscent of Joyce's prose, almost more than of any other poet's style.

If such a key does exist, however, it is guarded rather too well by the poet. Muldoon's displays impress more than they convince. And the reverse is also the case: when Muldoon seems intent on convincing us of his sincerity, when he writes directly about some personal experience, we are less impressed. His sensibility seems almost split between dazzle and sentiment, between the desire to perform and the desire to communicate or to bear witness. The topics that call forth this second style from Muldoon are the most intimate ones: his childhood, his family, his relation to Ireland and its turmoil.

Take, for example, the poem "Bran," from *Why Brownlee Left*:

> While he looks into the eyes of women
> Who have let themselves go,
> While they sigh and they moan
> For pure joy,
>
> He weeps for the boy on that small farm
> Who takes an oatmeal Labrador
> In his arms,
> Who knows all there is of rapture.

This is an almost awkwardly sentimental poem, in which a grown man reminisces about his childhood dog. There are no conceits here, the rhymes are fairly straightforward; Muldoon does not need or want to put this statement through the mill of his more complex style. In part, we may attribute this simplicity to Muldoon's own stylistic evolution: the poems of his first few books are by and large far less conceited and complicated than those in *The Annals of Chile* and *Hay*. Yet even in his new volume Muldoon generally softens in the face of certain tender subjects, as in the title poem:

> This much I know. Just as I'm about to
> make that right turn
> off Province Line Road
> I meet another beat-up Volvo
> carrying a load
>
> of hay. (More accurately, a bale of lucerne
> on the roof rack,
> a bale of lucerne or fescue or alfalfa.)
> My hands are raw. I'm itching to cut the
> twine, to unpack
>
> that hay-accordion, that hay-concertina.
> It must be ten o'clock. There's still enough
> light
> (not least from the glow
>
> of the bales themselves) for a body to
> ascertain
> that when one bursts, as now, something
> takes flight

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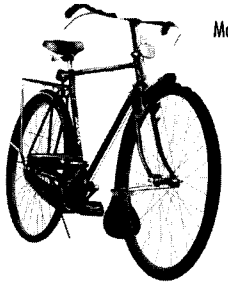
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from those hot-and-heavy box pleats.
This much, at least, I know.

Here we have the complex rhymes ("Volvo" and "alfalfa") and the delight in strange words ("lucerne or fescue") that we see also in "The Bangle (Slight Return)"; but this poem has a very short trajectory, aiming at exactly the kind of small, quasi-spiritual affirmation ("this much, at least, I know") that is so often found in contemporary poetry. Also common is the twinge of sexual regret in "White Shoulders":

My heart is heavy. For I saw Fionnuala,
"The Gem of the Roe," "The Flower of
Sweet Strabane,"
when a girl reached down into a freezer
bin
to bring up my double scoop of vanilla.

Such poems suggest that the emotional sources of Muldoon's poetry are fairly simple, even familiar; and so, when we find such great unfamiliarity in some of his poems, we are tempted to conclude that their elaborate form is divorced from their function, which, in poetry, must always be some sort of statement, some communication. It is possible to express simple, even banal, emotions beautifully—by writing a song, say, as Yeats did in "To an Isle in the Water":

Shy one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

And it is possible that a very complex set of emotions, or emotions fleshed as ideas, will require stylistic obscurity for their expression. Eliot is the best example in modern English poetry of a poet whose difficulty is completely integral:

Dayadhvam: I have heard the key
Turn in the door once and turn once only
We think of the key, each in his prison
Thinking of the key, each confirms
a prison
Only at nightfall, aethereal rumours
Revive for a moment a broken
Coriolanus....

It may be nearly impossible to say for certain what Coriolanus has to do with the preceding passage; but the sound and the rhythm, and the general mythic atmosphere that Eliot has created over the course of the whole poem, make the reference so natural that its actual strangeness is barely noticed. Difficulty, at its best, functions as it does in the best parts of "The Waste Land": each element, no matter how strange, is inextricable.

Muldoon falls somewhere between these poles; his sensibility is less complex than his style. Only in one poem, "Incantata" from *The Annals of Chile*, is there a real sense that the poet is making his virtuosity do more substantive—more truly poetic—work. This is partially because the subject matter of the poem—it is an elegy for a dead lover—has an inherent emotional power. Indeed, at the beginning of the poem, Muldoon's style seems fatally at odds with that power:

I thought of you tonight, *a leanbh*,
lying there in your long barrow
colder and dumber than a fish by
Francisco de Herrera,
as I X-Actoed from a spud the Inca
glyph for a mouth....

Those four lines have so many clashing signals and registers—a dead body is "dumber than a fish," Francisco de Herrera is juxtaposed with an Inca glyph, the American brand-name "X-Acto" follows a bit of untranslated Gaelic—that one doubts Muldoon's ability to resolve them all into a coherent mood. Yet he solves the problem with an ingenious conceit: the last twenty stanzas of the poem are a long list of things, evidently things known to and shared by the poet and the dead woman, that have vanished with her death. Virtuosity almost enforces the logic of a list, as the performer does a series of ever-more-astounding tricks; but memory also resorts to listing, piecing together items whose inner connection—whose syntax—has vanished with time. Thus Muldoon builds an ever-extending catalog, in ecstatic long lines, whose miscellaneity is part of its force:

That's all that's left....

Of the bride carried over the threshold,
hey, only to alight
on the limestone slab of another
threshold,
of the swarm, the cast,
the colt, the spew of bees hanging like
a bottle of Lucozade
from a branch the groom must sever....

Of *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, of Seurat's
piling of tesserae upon tesserae
to give us a monkey arching its back
and the smoke arching out from a
smoke-stack,
of Sunday afternoons in the Botanic
Gardens, going with the flow
of the burghers of Sandy Row and Donegal
Pass and Andersonstown and Rathcoole,

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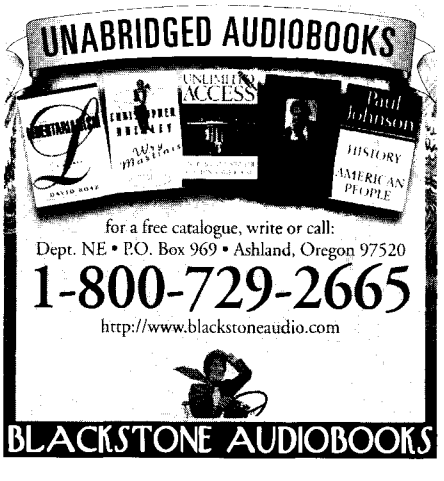

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of the army Landrover flaunt-flouncing by with its heavy furbelow.

High culture and junk food, nature and art, marriage and death all find a place in Muldoon's poem; and after some initial resistance, we agree to their assembly. "Incantata," more than any other of Muldoon's long poems, involves as well as impresses.

After "Incantata" and "Yarrow," the stunningly complex poem that makes up well over two-thirds of *The Annals of Chile*, Muldoon's inventiveness seems to have cooled a bit in *Hay*. This book demonstrates the dangers that can arise when ingenuity becomes a habit, to be sustained for its own sake. Too often in *Hay*, Muldoon allows his premise—to record the changing of the seasons in a series of haiku ("Hopewell Haiku"), to write an autobiography by means of comments on rock albums ("Sleeve Notes")—to do too much of the work, resulting in a poem that is less than the sum of its parts. And the poems in which there is less planning and more actual inventiveness—the opening "The Mudroom," the closing sonnet sequence—have neither the scope nor the energy of his best displays.

The best poem in the volume, for sheer technical daring and exuberance, is the double-sestina "Green Gown." It is another collage, in which the green gown "sported by Lecherie in *The Faerie Queene*" is at the center of a web that includes an attempted seduction, a game of pool, a pretentious academic discussion of poetry, and thoughts of Rilke. The odd-numbered stanzas have one set of end-words, the even-numbered stanzas have another, and they go through the stylized rotation of the sestina form in parallel; the envoy combines all twelve end-words. It is a labor just to realize that the pattern exists, and then to identify the permutations of end-words: "roes" becomes "Rose" and "Averroes," "ivory" chimes with "Faerie," "Fauré," and "Porphyry." When it is all over, one marvels at what Muldoon has managed to accomplish. The problem is that it is hard to remember what he said.

Still, at a time when poetry has all but forgotten the possibilities of adventurous form, when the majority of poets are trivially self-expressive and the minority with higher ambitions pursue a formless complexity, Muldoon's ability to construct his poems is rare, and admirable. Virtuosity may not be enough to make Muldoon's poems an inexhaustible resource, as the best poetry is; but it is enough to make them a source of pleasure. •

CORRESPONDENCE *continued from page 5*

you have the power to discriminate against Asian Americans at will. No, freedom from discrimination and black competitiveness are all I long for. And I am proud that, search as he might, Wolfe could turn up no other "visions of the good society" in my work.

Elsewhere, Wolfe says he does not like my idea of ulteriorality because "liberalism is undermined by a propensity toward suspicion." (As if the infamous black conservative is supposed to fret over the undermining of liberalism.) But ulteriorality simply says that America's racial policies have been more accountable to their ulterior goals—giving whites a way to display racial goodwill and blacks a way to display power—than to their announced goal of achieving racial equality. Policies that are driven by powerful ulterior motivations can survive for decades without even being examined for effectiveness. Affirmative action and welfare without requirement of work or educational development are examples. When Wolfe says that we should not look at the ulterior human motivations that often prop up terrible public policy on race, he regresses to the sandbox liberalism of Barney the Dinosaur, in which there is never more than one insipid level of meaning. Probably nothing he says in his review better exhibits the haplessness and the triteness of his thinking than this call for a liberalism in which people are not suspicious—in which, I suppose, we protect our visions of the "good society" by guilelessly believing that people are always what they say they are. It may be only a symptom of the disease that Wolfe sees in me, but, when someone asks me not to be suspicious, I wonder what he or she is hiding.

And then there is the matter of "data." Now that Bowen and Bok have brought numbers to the liberal defense of affirmative action, "data" has become the liberal mantra of the season. But it was not the mantra of a few seasons ago when Herrnstein and Murray insinuated from behind a mountain of data that blacks might be genetically inferior. Wolfe admonishes me for having no "hard data" like Bowen and Bok. Yet what subject corrupts data analysis more predictably than race? Herrnstein and Murray have no smoking gun of black inferiority, and Bowen and Bok have not one shred of evidence to prove that affirmative action as a variable has the effect of closing the infamous performance gap between blacks and whites.

Wolfe skims right over my point that social scientists—particularly in the highly politicized area of race—very often massage their data into predetermined and ideological contours. As an essayist, my arguments have to have inherent logic and face validity *despite* my ideology. I work against preconception. And, in this, I labor in the same tradition (though not at the same level) as many of my heroes—Frederick Douglass, James Baldwin, and Ralph Ellison, to name only a few. These are all writers whose best work stands largely unrefuted as much data-driven social science has come and gone—which is not to say that my work will stand past next week. But time will have to arbitrate that.

And, in the meantime, when Wolfe cries "data" at my book, it is simply his way of running away from it. The stigmatization of whites as racists, their reliance on deference and license to reclaim white moral authority, the distortion of race-related public policy into an ineffectual iconography, the "contingent" thinking at the center of black politics, the white liberal assumption of agency over black difficulties, the practice of indirection, the seeking of power through ideas of the good: These are only some of the themes that Wolfe ignores as he goes after a conservatism of "the market," global economies, and "hierarchy" that never appears in the book.

A problem for Wolfe, and for liberal whites generally, is that their liberalism has to take a position on black advancement in order to be valid. Yet, as whites, they lack the moral authority to take a position that demands from blacks the enormous effort that it will take for them to become competitive. Unable to ask what is necessary from those they want to help, these whites are forced into the deferential and preferential engineering of blacks into an *image* "diversity" that *figuratively* redeems the nation's racial shame.

Wolfe does not have the moral authority or the courage to think about black advancement in the demanding terms of *A Dream Deferred*—terms that ask blacks to agent their advancement into competitiveness whether or not whites adequately help them and whether or not the "good society" has been achieved. I don't like Wolfe's "good society" liberalism because it doesn't even know what the real challenge is. It is toothless and blind, and I wrote this book hoping that both whites and blacks would see the urgency in disentangling it from the black cause. It would have been nice if Wolfe had

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accepted the book on these terms and given us his thoughts.

SHELBY STEELE
Monterey, California

Beyond metaphysics

To the editors:

The trouble with Michael André Bernstein's indictment of Martin Heidegger—the man and the thinker—is that it gives no hint of anything in his thought that might explain why it, unlike that of other German philosophers who embraced Nazism, deserves serious consideration as a set of philosophical theses ("Being and His Time," October 26). Instead, everything is subsumed under large political and ideological themes and judged accordingly. To cite just one example of how this kind of interpretation can distort our understanding of what makes Heidegger a remarkably original thinker, Bernstein has nothing to say about the central concept of *Being and Time*—that of being-in-the-world as a revisionary concept of human being. It has a philosophical significance that cannot be understood in the terms Bernstein has chosen, and it is certainly free of any detectable political motivation or implications. There are lots of things in Heidegger's writings that are problematic at best and some that are downright discreditable. But it is surely perverse to concentrate all one's attention on these rather easy targets and to pass over in silence the things that really deserve the serious attention they mostly have not received.

FREDERICK A. OLAFSON
San Diego, California

Michael André Bernstein replies:

In a few sentences, Frederick Olafson unwittingly crystallizes the moral blindness of conventional defenses of Heidegger more effectively than did my original piece. To Olafson, a prosaic critique of Heidegger's philosophy, and a rejection of his fundamental notion of an unbridgeable chasm between authentic and inauthentic life, can only be motivated by trivial "political and ideological themes." But, precisely because it is so important to separate the potential richness of insights like Heidegger's "being-in-the-world" from the constellation of ethically and intellectually shabby assumptions with which he himself regularly associated them, Olafson's Olympian certainty about what really deserves "serious attention" and what is just a "perverse" concentration on minor issues like Heidegger's Nazism can only persuade someone already thoroughly convinced of the very assumptions I set out to question.

TRB *continued from page 6*

the cold war assumption that, when it comes to relations with Moscow, money is no object. NASA and Russia might, instead, merge their planetary programs, achieving the desired positive symbolism at a fraction of the cost of a space station.

The strongest objection to the station is that it places the cart before the horse. Someday, space stations might be desirable, along with even grander projects in space. Today, with each space shuttle launch costing at least $400 million, it's fiscal lunacy to be building a 475-ton chalet above the atmosphere. Instead, NASA's focus should be on developing new systems that cut the cost of access to space.

NASA's striking weakness is that the rockets it launches are almost as geriatric as John Glenn. The Atlas, Delta, and Titan boosters employed for satellite launches were all designed in the 1950s, before microelectronics, composite materials, or even pocket calculators. And the space shuttle is rather older than it seems, its basic design commitments having been made back in 1972. Gleaming as a technical success, the shuttle has been a budgetary fiasco: Most launches cost considerably *more* per pound of payload than launches aboard throwaway rockets. No rational planner would use the shuttle for anything other than space-station crew rotation flights—a restive point for NASA, since, by all appearances, the space station is being built primarily to give the shuttle something to do.

NASA has fresh launcher ideas in mock-up, among them the X33, a "single-stage to orbit" machine that would rise to space in one piece, just like the rockets in "Buck Rogers" serials. Other ideas for advanced, lower-cost launchers are bouncing around the space agency and industry. If the X33 works, it might make access to space relatively affordable and routine, similar to a very fancy airplane flight. Then grand goals such as space stations or Mars travel could make sense.

The intelligent course is to postpone the space station indefinitely, diverting funds to basic rocketry research until the X33 or some other new affordable launcher is coursing the ionosphere. As it stands, there is more than a little chance that the station will be half-built and then canceled, a clump of powered-down modules circling overhead as a cislunar white elephant. NASA might be about to launch the first components of its own political demise. Good thing for Glenn he'll be off the flight list by then.

GREGG EASTERBROOK

God is a dangerous idea—whether animistic or vitalistic, theistic or deistic—perverting justice in ethics and politics. Of ancient philosophies Epicureanism alone disposed of this problem with coherent doctrines about chance/necessary interaction of atoms, about evolutionary development, and about basic biological drives. The historical Jesus agreed more with this than with Judaism—more atheist/realist than theist/idealist—as indicated by a recently unearthed document that claims to be enigmatic *ipsissima verba* of Jesus noted by an evidently puzzled student who wandered with him. Jack Hannah corroborates this claim with other independent ancient documents. All pertinent texts and commentary are provided.

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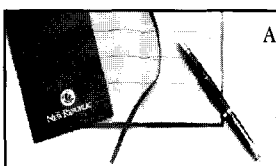

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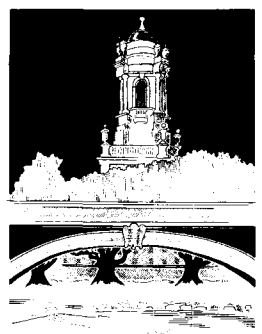
CAMBRIDGE DIARIST

Siege mentality

NO ONE IN HIS RIGHT MIND would allude to Jewish terror in the United States. It just doesn't exist. No one except, predictably, *The Washington Post*, which, in its customary desperation to find moral equivalents for everything, explains the controversy surrounding Ed Zwick's new movie, *The Siege*, this way: "To understand the objections of Arab Americans and Muslims to 20th Century Fox's new film, 'The Siege' ... picture the following scenario: a nefarious rabbi exhorts his extremist, ultra-Orthodox followers to plant bombs against Arab sympathizers in America...." The problem with picturing this is that nothing remotely like it has ever happened. It is true that one Palestinian was killed in California out of sheer hatred. Otherwise, the one rabbi—not ultra-Orthodox but ultra-nationalist—who did try to stir up actionable hatred of Arabs among U.S. Jews utterly failed. He moved to Israel, where he was barred from running for public office. In the end, Meir Kahane was assassinated in New York by just the sort of Arab terrorist depicted in Zwick's true-to-life film.

I ADMIRE ZWICK'S CINEMATIC skills in battle. I especially admire his moral seriousness. His most powerful work is *Glory*, based on the searing story of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw and the Colored Regiment that he commanded in the Civil War. Zwick's *Legends of the Fall* (with Anthony Hopkins and Brad Pitt) is a primordial tale with biblical resonance—about fathers and sons, in the way that Turgenev's novel is about fathers and sons. In both of these films, Zwick grappled with eternal issues: in the first, how painfully obstructed is the road from oppression to freedom; in the second, the boundaries between love and resentment, solidarity and loneliness. These are epic movies in a way that *The Siege* is not. Still, Zwick is faithful in his commitment to truth-telling. But in *The Siege* it is the cinema verité of what assaults us on CNN that he brings. So it has quick pace and recognizable place, and it also disturbs. And there is something TV news can never express—personal ambivalence that is not the equivalent of moral ambiguity.

WHAT THE FILMMAKER KNOWS and what he says is that the prospect of Muslim terror in America is real, very real. We have already experienced dozens of attacks on American targets, and we have had our dead and maimed. And there are terrorist incidents that did not come off quite as planned or that were headed off by law enforcement. All of this constitutes the factual basis for the movie. It is also the factual basis that the Council on American Islamic Relations and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and their hand-wringing allies in the media want to wish out of our view. With this pretext and pretense, they are trying to close down a film by a director who is so scrupulous with the facts and so fair that he has given the complainants much more than even a very extensive definition of probity would require. Before the movie was finished, Zwick showed his script to the sure-to-be-offended. They wanted to depict the terrorists as white militiamen. Zwick couldn't do that. This was not a film about native fascists. It was a film about immigrants, legal and illegal, who come to America and declare war on the "Great Satan." The arrival of people bearing the ideological baggage of anti-Americanism and intolerant religiosity is a more pressing problem and also a more interesting one. So Zwick did as much as he could and should—he changed a characterization here, a word there. Now the thought police have saddled him with prospective responsibility for any hate crimes against Muslims and Arabs. This is an empty threat based on legends and lies. CAIR and the AADC charged that, after the Oklahoma City bombing and before Tim McVeigh was apprehended, there were any number of vicious acts committed against Arabs and Muslims throughout the country. This turns out to have been a gross, unbelievably gross, exaggeration. But these charges have a life of their own on the talk shows and in the columns.



THE ONLY REAL FLAW IN ZWICK'S story has nothing to do with stereotyping. Rather, it lies in his imagining of how the U.S. authorities would cope with a terrorist spree by Muslims in New York. Basically, he has posited two official responses (and another rogue one). That is, there is a confrontation between the good guy, uphold-the-Constitution FBI (Denzel Washington), and the bad guy, trample-the-Bill-of-Rights U.S. Army (Bruce Willis), with the CIA playing, in the brilliantly seductive person of Annette Bening, an ambiguous function somewhere between sexual enticement and a deadly trap. The bad guys win: the military puts Brooklyn under martial law, rounds up all young Arab and Muslim men, and incarcerates them in a local sports stadium. To me, these scenes evoked the awful Nazi analogy: in 1942, the French police seized 4,000 Jewish children in Paris and herded them into the Vélodrome d'Hiver, their way station to deportation and death. I am sure that Zwick did not intend this. But artists should understand the resonance of the symbols they use. It would be one thing if it were conceivable that the United States might imprison thousands of innocent people simply on the basis of ethnicity, religion, or skin pigment in order to catch a few guilty ones. But this country is no longer capable of an internment like that of the Japanese-Americans during World War II—and thank God we are so disabled.

INDEED, OUR COURTS have actually disarmed law enforcement in the struggle against terrorism. And I do not thank God for that. One has only to look at the frustrated eleven-year effort of the immigration authorities to deport eight fund-raisers (six of whom stayed in the country illegally) for the murderous Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine to grasp that the Constitution is now part of the defensive repertoire of America's enemies. This is only one such illustrative instance out of many. Thus, *The Siege*'s mass-arrest scenario is preposterous. But the indiscriminate dragnet creates an opening for a multicultural protest against the men in khaki: the people of Brooklyn take to the streets against the repression aimed at their neighbors. I don't think this is altogether plausible, either.

BUT WHAT ZWICK WAS RIGHTLY trying to do was to complicate his portrait of the antagonistic groups in his drama. Lawmen sometimes do violate rights, and, of course, Arabs and Muslims are not all, or even mostly, stick-figure gunmen and bomb throwers. Zwick's most textured character, played by Tony Shalhoub, is an Arab American FBI man who breaks down when his son is among those rounded up. Afraid to admit to their shame about Arab terrorism, Zwick's tormentors do not want to see any of this. They want to see Zwick only as a stick-figure anti-Arab Hollywood Jew. Even with its flaws, Zwick's film is too intricate—and too riveting—to dismiss.

MARTIN PERETZ

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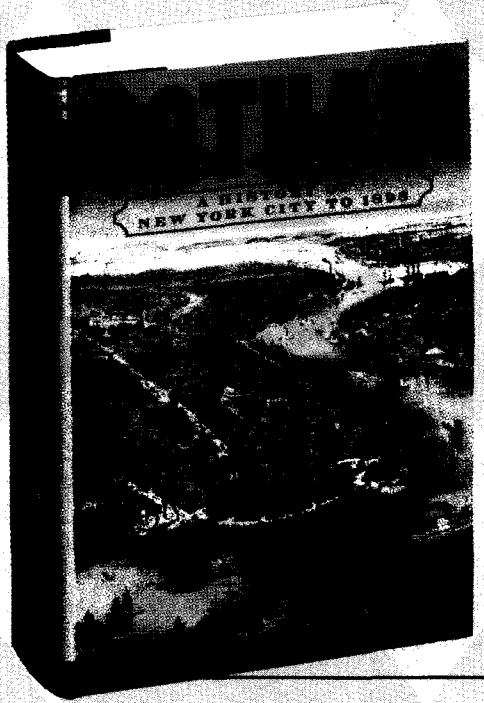

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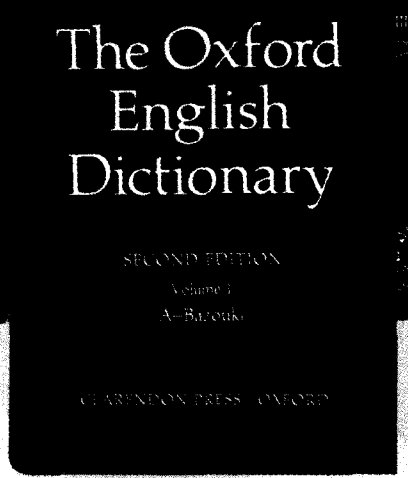

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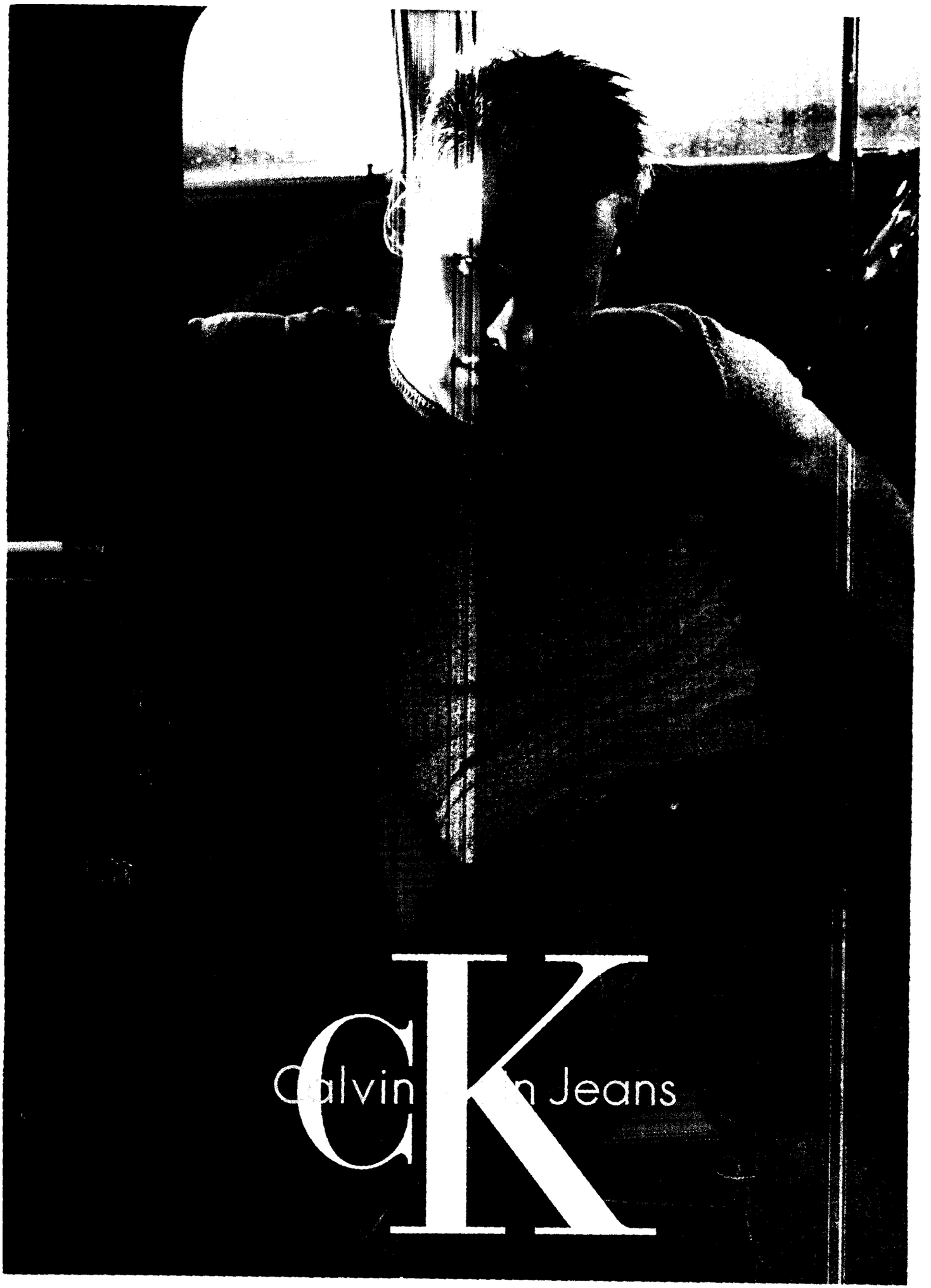

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